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ENTERED AS SECOND CLASS MATTER AT THE NEW YORK, N. Y., POST OFFICE.

December 26, 1894.

No. 844.

Published Every
Wednesday.

Beadle & Adams, Publishers,
98 WILLIAM STREET, NEW YORK.

Ten Cents a Copy.
\$5.00 a Year.

Vol. LXV.



OR,

THAD BURR'S Great Trunk Mystery.

BY HAROLD PAYNE,
AUTHOR OF THE "THAD BURR" NOVELS,
ETC., ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.
QUEER BAGGAGE.

IN Madison street, about two blocks west
of the Chicago River, is a hotel of the cheaper
and humbler class patronized principally by

IT WAS ONE OF THE MOST WEIRD ORGIES THE DETECTIVE HAD EVER DREAMED OF.

working men. It is called "The United States Hotel."

Many of the sailors who navigate the great, fresh-water lakes, make this their headquarters while taking a dry land vacation, and consequently a rather rough set is generally to be found about the house.

During a good part of the day and evening the common room, which includes the office, is pretty well filled with an unwashed, unsavory crowd, who add to the general vile odor of the place by smoking rank pipes.

It is not to be wondered at, therefore, that when a well-dressed, prosperous-looking man entered the office on a certain afternoon (it was on the fifteenth of October,) walked up to the clerk's desk and registered, there was a good deal of curiosity among the crowd of loungers.

The stranger was below the medium height, slight of figure and refined of feature and manner.

He had dark hair and a pointed beard of the same hue, remarkably black, penetrating eyes, and an exceedingly white, chalky complexion.

Other striking features were a mouth of exceptional beauty for a man, lips as red and fresh as those of a school-girl, and teeth that were simply perfection in the matter of evenness and whiteness.

The man registered as Jules Revere, and it was therefore concluded that he was a Frenchman, although he did not betray the fact by the slightest accent. Indeed he used extremely pure and correct English.

Having registered and paid for a room a couple of days in advance the stranger said to the clerk:

"I have paid for two days in advance, in order that the room may be reserved for me; nevertheless I am going away to be absent two days. Upon my return I shall pay for whatever time I may conclude to stay. In the mean time, my trunk will arrive, and I shall esteem it a kindness if you will have it put in my room when it comes."

The clerk promised to comply with the request, and the little man went away.

Late the same afternoon a large zinc-covered trunk was brought to the hotel by an employee of one of the Express companies, addressed to Jules Revere.

In accordance with his promise, the clerk had the trunk carried up to the room which the stranger had engaged.

The porters complained that the trunk was exceedingly heavy, but, once it had been placed inside the room and the door thereof locked, nothing more was thought of it.

At least, not at that time. But, after the two days had elapsed, and the stranger did not return, the hotel authorities began to think; and when three, and then four days went by, and still he failed to put in an appearance, they grew anxious, and the landlord and clerk paid a visit to the room for the purpose of taking an exterior view of the trunk, although they had no thought of opening it, for awhile yet.

But, when they entered the room their nostrils were met by a most offensive odor, which, they were not long in discovering, emanated from the trunk.

The two left the room instantly, and, a few minutes later, the police were notified of the hotel people's suspicions—that the trunk contained a species of baggage not usually carried about in that manner.

These suspicions were subsequently found to be well-grounded, for when the police arrived, took the trunk to the station and opened it, it was discovered to contain the body of a man in an utterly nude state.

It appeared to be the body of a person about forty-five years old, tall and heavily built.

No marks of violence were visible, and it was therefore concluded that, if the man had been murdered, some sort of subtle poison had been employed.

But the autopsy failed to show the presence of organic poison, of any kind.

Doctors and police were alike stumped—one at being unable to discover how the man came to his death, and the other at being unable to discover any clue to where the man came from, who he was, who had sent him or who had perpetrated the murder, if such it was.

At this juncture Detective Thaddeus Burr

arrived in Chicago on his way to New York after a trip to the Pacific Slope.

The chief of police, having word of the great detective's arrival in the city, lost no time in calling upon him at the Auditorium Hotel.

The two men had never met before, but Burr's reputation had spread from ocean to ocean, and there was not a chief in the land who did not know him by reputation.

"I am glad to meet you, sir," declared the chief, after they had shaken hands and passed the time of day. "Glad for two reasons: First, I have heard so much of you in connection with your great work, and second, we have got a case on our hands that puzzles the best of us, and I should like very much if you could stop over a day or two and give us a lift. I know of no man, judging from what they say of you, who would be more likely to clear up the mystery."

"I'm afraid the accounts you have had of me, chief," replied Thad, modestly, "have been too extravagant. But, what is your mystery?"

The chief related the account of the trunk mystery, with the few facts that they had been able to glean, and concluded by saying:

"It is the most mysterious case we have ever had. It baffles the best of us."

"Are there no marks about the trunk?" inquired the detective. "Nothing upon which you can base a clue as to what part of the country it came from?"

"Nothing except the maker's name and address, which shows the trunk to have been made here in Chicago."

"Was there no Express label on it? You say it came by Express."

"No, and that is the oddest part of it. There is the mark where a label has been pasted, but it has been carefully removed, but by whom is the puzzle."

"Do not the people at the hotel remember what Express Company delivered it?"

"No, they can remember nothing about it."

"However, that part of it will be easy enough to unravel. It won't take long to go to all the Express offices, and when we find the right one there will be a record there of the receipt and delivery of the trunk."

"That is true!" exclaimed the chief. "Why did we not think of that? Well, that is one reason why I desire to get you to help us out, Mr. Burr. I know that you never overlook details, no matter how trivial."

"Well," replied Thad, "I am in a good deal of a hurry to get back home, but as this looks like a pretty interesting case, I guess I can manage to spare a day or two for the purpose of looking into it."

"Thanks," cried the chief, delightedly. "I feel a thousand times more confident now. Will you go over to the Central Office with me and take a look at the trunk?"

"Yes, I will go over with you, chief," and fifteen minutes later they were at the Central Station. The body had been removed to the Morgue, and Thad had nothing to do but examine the trunk at leisure.

After devoting half an hour to this, he rejoined the chief of police in his office.

"Well, what do you make of it, Mr. Burr?" was questioned.

"Not much," rejoined the detective. "As you say, the trunk is of Chicago manufacture, and, if signs go for anything, it has never traveled far beyond the city limits."

"How do you make that out?" inquired the chief, curiously.

"Why, a trunk that has done much traveling by Express shows the fact in the wear and tear of the corners. Express porters and baggagemen generally, invariably throw a trunk on its corner, so by the time it has gone a thousand miles, with one or two stopovers, the corners become pretty well battered. This trunk, while by no means a new one, does not appear to have ever received any of this rough usage."

"Well, I'll be switched!" cried the chief, enthusiastically. "There's another point I should never have thought of. There is no use of talking, detective, you are a shrewd one. But, is that all the discovery you have made?"

"Not quite," returned Thad, thought-

fully. "The person who owned the trunk was in some way connected with the theatrical profession. I should say that he or she was an actor or actress."

"For the love of heaven, how do you arrive at this conclusion?" gasped the superior, with wide-open eyes. "You are a wizard, sir."

"Nothing of the kind," returned Thad, laughing at the other's look of astonishment. "I dropped upon the clue, or theory, in the most natural way, and I have two reasons for believing my theory correct. In the first place, the trunk is the kind usually used by actors and actresses, and seldom by anybody else. In the second place, there are several daubs of grease-paint around the edges of where the tray has been, and I guess you will hardly accuse anybody but a member of the profession of being guilty of using grease-paint, will you?"

"This is most remarkable!" ejaculated the chief, still more astonished. "What else did you discover?"

"Nothing but this," and the detective exhibited a crumpled envelope directed to Stephen B. Langford, Southern Hotel, St. Louis, in a feminine hand, and in the upper left hand corner was printed the card of M. Hesse & Son, diamond merchants, Maiden lane, New York.

"Where did you find that?" asked the chief, examining the envelope carefully.

"It had slipped in behind the lining of the trunk," replied Thad.

"And what is your theory with regard to it?"

"That, possibly—this is only a theory, mind—the owner of the trunk might have borne the name of Langford—that he, at some time, stopped at the Southern Hotel, St. Louis, and that he had correspondence with the diamond merchants whose card is on the corner of the envelope."

"By George! you came pretty near learning the whole business at one jump. Our folks would never have made these discoveries. It strikes me that you aren't going to have such an up-hill job of it, after all."

"I don't know about that. These apparent clues may prove worthless, after all. It may turn out that the trunk has had half a dozen owners, and that the recipient of this letter had nothing to do with shipping the body."

"True enough."

"But, the worst stumbling-block in our way is the fact that the doctors failed to discover any indication that the man came to his death by any other than natural causes; in which case, we may be chasing a will-o'-the-wisp. In other words, the body may be nothing more than some medical student's subject, which he purchased somewhere."

"But how do you account for his not returning to the hotel, supposing the man who registered and paid for a room to have been a medical student?"

"Various reasons might be assigned," assumed Burr, thoughtfully. "He may have been delayed beyond the time at which he expected to return, then the discovery of the body was made by the police and the fact published in the newspapers; so, learning of this he was afraid to return."

"By Jove, Burr, you take all the wind out of our sails. I thought we had run upon a great case, but now you make me believe we have nothing worth worrying about."

"As I told you, this is only theory, and a very vague one at that. It may, and I am inclined to believe it will, turn out to be something worth while. But, let us go and have a look at the body."

The two men left the station and made their way to the Morgue, and as soon as Thad had looked the body over carefully, he said:

"He is a Californian; he was a man well-to-do, and, in my opinion, came to his death by foul means."

"How do you make out that he is a Californian?"

"By the shape of his beard. You never see anybody but a Californian wear that peculiar shaped goatee."

CHAPTER II.

TWO IMPORTANT INTERVIEWS.

Burr's first move after leaving the police-station was to visit the various Express-offices; but, to his disappointment, none of them had received the trunk in question.

He then thought of the City Express, which makes a business of carrying baggage and parcels from one part of the city to another and called at its office.

Here he was more successful; they had delivered the trunk, but as it had been brought to the office, the agent had no idea where it had come from.

Burr also telegraphed, in the name of the Chicago Police Department, to the New York diamond merchants, inquiring if they knew anything about Stephen B. Langford.

The reply came back, stating that they knew nothing about the man, beyond the fact that he had called some time previously and looked at some diamonds, but that he did not decide upon taking them at that time. Subsequently they had received a letter from him, at St. Louis, inclosing a draft for payment for the diamonds and ordering them to be sent to him at the Southern Hotel, St. Louis. The diamonds had been sent, and that was the last they had ever heard of him.

Another dispatch to the proprietor of the Southern Hotel brought the reply that a man by the name of Stephen B. Langford had stopped for some time at that house, but had left there a week previous.

The man, the telegram stated, was from Los Angeles, California.

When the chief read the telegram he jumped clean off the floor.

"Burr, you're a wizard, and there is no use denying it!" he declared. "Now we're getting things in line."

"What is your theory, chief?"

"I should say that the dead man, who you say is a Californian, is no other than Stephen B. Langford, the same man who stopped at the Southern Hotel."

"Yes," rejoined Thad, "that is also my theory, and he was doubtless murdered for the diamonds. At least the presence of the diamonds furnishes an incentive, and gives us something to work on."

"But we must not forget the other one—the man who shipped the body."

"No; I keep him in mind."

"What is your theory with regard to him?"

"Well," returned Thad, "I think it quite likely that the man who registered at the United States Hotel was the identical party who did the shipping. Judging from what we have learned of the case, so far, I should say that the perpetrator of this crime was a sly, secretive chap, and that he trusts none of his work to second hands."

"Your theory, then, is?"

"That this sleek fellow is the murderer. That either the crime was committed in this city, or if done in St. Louis, that the murderer brought the trunk containing the body as his personal baggage to this city."

"Arriving here, he allowed the trunk to remain in the baggage room until he procured the room in the hotel; then he had it sent to the local Express company, with instructions to send it to the obscure west-side hotel."

"That looks tangible."

"In this way he avoided the eyes of too many witnesses. He avoided being seen by the Express people, and he prevented the possibility, as he supposed, of the trunk being traced to St. Louis."

"And would have succeeded, if it had not been for the tell-tale letter."

"Undoubtedly."

"Well, it appears to me that we have got something to work on, Mr. Burr. How do you propose to proceed?"

"My first move will be to run over to St. Louis to-night, and see if I can get any trace of the chap who registered at the United States Hotel."

"A good idea, and you will have just about time enough to catch that 7.15 train over the Central."

"Then good by, chief. I'm off," and with a hasty hand shake, the great detective hurried from Police Headquarters, and ten minutes later was at the Union Depot.

He was not a minute too soon, either, for he hardly had time to purchase his ticket and take his seat in the sleeping-car, when the train rolled out of the depot.

At 5.30 the following morning Thad found himself in the Union Depot at St. Louis.

The morning was clear and crisp—just the morning for a walk—so the New York detective walked down Clark street, past the great Four Courts building, thence on down the same street to Broadway, turning south, walked to the corner of Walnut street, near which is one of the entrances to the Southern Hotel, which occupies the entire block.

It was now a few minutes past six o'clock, and the night-clerk was still on.

Burr walked up to the desk and asked:

"Is there a man by the name of Langford stopping here?"

The clerk referred to the register, and then asked:

"When did he arrive—supposing him to be here?"

Making a guess at random, Thad answered:

"I should say about two weeks."

The clerk went back two weeks, and at length ran across the name.

"Stephen B. Langford, Los Angeles, California," he muttered.

"That is the man," declared Burr.

"He has gone," added the clerk, examining an entry opposite the name in the register.

"When did he go?"

"On the 6th."

"A little more than a week ago," mused the detective. "Yes, that tallies all right." Then to the clerk:

"Was there any one with him when he left?"

"That I could not answer," replied the clerk, "because I only know from the register that he was here at all, and do not know anything about his going."

"You do not recall the person then?"

"No. You see there are so many—"

"A tall, heavily-built man," interposed the detective, "with a heavy mustache and goatee."

"Oh, now that you describe him," exclaimed the clerk, with sudden energy, "I believe I do recall him. Great drinker, and loud talker, wasn't he?"

Assuming that Langford might have been just such a man, Thad assented.

"Spent money lavishly," pursued the clerk, "and had some pretty valuable sparklers?"

"I believe he had some pretty fair diamonds," hazarded Burr, feeling that he was on the right scent. "If I am not mistaken, he purchased some while he was here."

"Yes, he had some sent on from New York," affirmed the clerk.

"Now that you recall the man," resumed the detective, after a moment's reflection, "do you recall whether he had anybody with him or not?"

"No, he had a room to himself," rejoined the hotel man, again referring to his register. "But there was a fellow he used to have with him a good deal, I recollect."

"What sort of a looking man was he?" interrupted Thad, catching at the apparent clue.

"He was a little fellow," replied the clerk, "not more than half the size of the Californian."

"Black hair and eyes?"

"Yes, and keen black eyes at that."

"And a pointed beard of the same color?" put in Burr.

"N—no," mused the clerk. "This man wore only a slight mustache, and it was such a peculiar-looking arrangement that I used to think it was false."

This was a set-back for Thad.

Up to that moment his theory had run along without a break, but here was a slight discrepancy.

"However," he reflected, after a moment of doubt, "it is possible that the fellow was disguised when he went to the Chicago hotel."

"Did the two appear to be pretty intimate?"

"Yes, they seemed to be pretty good friends," admitted the clerk. "The little man used to borrow money of the Californian, I take it, for on two different occasions the latter came to the office late at night to get a bill changed, and each time he turned and handed a portion of the change to the little man."

Thad had reserved his clinching question as a sweet morsel, and now he deemed it the proper time to spring it.

"Did you learn the name of the little man?" he questioned.

"No," was the disappointing reply.

"You never noticed what name the big man addressed him by?"

"Let me see—" mused the clerk. "Yes, come to think of it, I believe I do recollect him calling the little chap, 'Percy.'"

"Percy?" mused Thad. "Oh, well, the name is of slight importance, anyway. It is so easy to change that."

Nevertheless he made a note of the name "Percy" in his note-book, and then asked:

"This man did not stop in the house, then?"

"No," was the reply.

"And you have no idea where he stopped, I presume?"

"I have not. He used to call here nearly every evening a little after seven and ask if Langford was in his room. If the answer was in the affirmative, he would step over to the elevator and go up; if not, he would stand around for awhile, and if he did not run across his man, he would go away, but was sure to return a little later and ask whether his friend had returned or not. He always alluded to the Californian as his friend, and the latter would inquire for him in the same way."

"They did not mention names?"

"Never, as I remember."

"How do you come to recall all these details?" questioned the detective curiously.

"Why, the fellow always came in, as I said, a little after seven, which is the time I come on, and I got at length to watching for my man. He rarely disappointed me, and the same old story was rehearsed."

By this time it was seven o'clock, and the day clerk came on.

But when questioned he was found to know less than the night clerk, being unable to recollect the little man at all.

He gave one piece of information, however, which the night clerk was unable to do. He recalled the fact that Langford had expressed his intention of going direct to California when he left the hotel.

"Was any one with him when he left?" asked the inquisitor.

"No," was the answer. "At least, I saw no one."

Having gained all the information possible at the clerk's desk, Thad went to the bar for further investigation.

Being a drinking man, as the clerk had intimated, the barkeeper ought to know the Californian, reasoned the New Yorker.

A half a dozen barkeepers were behind the bar when Thad entered, and after ordering a mild drink, he asked of the man who had waited upon him:

"Do you remember a Californian who was here about a week or so ago?"

"A big fellow—shot off his gab a good deal?" the barkeeper suggested.

"That's the man," rejoined Thad.

"Yes, I remember him well. What's become of him?"

"That is what I'm trying to find out," replied the detective. "Do you recall a little chap who used to run with him, a good deal?"

"Percy?"

"Yes, that is he."

"Yes, I remember him."

"Do you know what has become of him?"

"No, they both disappeared together."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean," returned the saloon man, "that they both ceased showing up here at the same time."

"Oh," muttered Thad, disappointedly. "Do you know where the little fellow belongs?"

"No."

"You do not even know where he stopped?"

"No. I know he didn't stop in the house, though, for he used to come in half a dozen times a day inquiring for his friend."

"You say they called him Percy?"

"Yes."

"Did you ever hear any other name for him?"

"No, not that I remem—hold on!" cried the barkeeper suddenly, turning about and picking up an envelope that lay on the decanter ledge. "Here is a letter directed to Francis Percival, care Southern Hotel, bar."

I wonder if that could be him. It's been layin' here for about a week, and nobody hain't called for it."

"Let me look at it," requested Thad.

He was given the letter. The writing of the superscription looked familiar. It was that of a woman. He took the letter he had found in the trunk from his pocket and compared the handwriting. They appeared to be the same.

CHAPTER III.

A CUNNING TRICK.

On the day preceding the one on which the above events occurred, another interesting drama was enacted in the Lake City.

In Forest avenue stands a large, plain and unostentatious house built of brown stone.

To the casual observer there appears nothing peculiar about the edifice, except its immense size and its extreme plainness, which contrasts strangely with the magnificent palaces about it.

Its utter lack of ornament might lead the observer to believe it to be some sort of public institution.

This belief might be strengthened by the modest tin sign with gilt letters on the jamb of the main entrance, which reads as follows:

JULES REVERE,

INSOMNIA AND INCIPIENT INSANITY
TREATED.

You are struck with the absolute modesty everywhere observable. The sign is modest in size, and the lettering is not obtrusive. There is neither the prefix "Professor," nor the affix "M. D." to the name, nor does the practitioner make any pretension of curing. He simply announces that certain disorders are "treated."

It was early in the forenoon of the day in question, when a splendid equipage drove up to this establishment, and a tall, stately woman alighted and rung the bell.

She was richly, though not ostentatiously, dressed, in black silk.

When the attendant opened the door, she said:

"I wish to see Doctor Revere."

"Mister Revere is in," returned the attendant, with singular emphasis on the "mister."

"Is not the doctor in?" asked the lady, hesitatingly.

"There is no doctor here, madam," replied the servant promptly. "Mr. Revere is who you probably want to see."

After some hesitation the woman took a card from her card-case, and handing it to servant said:

"Very well. Give him this."

"With pleasure," rejoined the attendant, bowing obsequiously. "Will not madame step into the parlor and wait?"

With which he swung open the great door, and the lady walked into the sitting-room and sunk upon a chair.

The room was magnificently furnished, and from every point you could look you found the image of yourself staring from the depths of a great mirror.

Thus Winnifred Rayburn saw herself reflected, and she saw with extreme regret her once beautiful face becoming faded and seamed with age, and the once divine locks of nut-brown waxing white.

But she had not long to muse upon these melancholy facts, for scarcely had she been seated three minutes, when a light, quick step announced the approach of some one, and, the next instant, a tall, pale man of probably thirty, burst through the portieres and stood before her.

The man had a remarkably high, narrow forehead, exceedingly black hair and very black, piercing eyes.

"Mrs. Rayburn?" he questioned, referring to the card and then bowing profoundly.

"Miss Rayburn," she corrected, rising. "This is Doctor Revere, I presume?"

"No," he replied, with a quaint smile, "just plain Mister Revere, madam. What can I do for you?"

"You receive patients afflicted with dementia here, do you not?" she asked, cautiously.

"Yes," he replied, shortly.

"Well, I have a—a—patient for you," she faltered.

"Man or woman?" he inquired, bluntly.

"Man—that is, a young man."

"Any relation?"

"Ye—yes," she hesitated. "Brother."

"Ah," exclaimed the tall young man, stroking his chin thoughtfully. "Wish to bring him to-day?"

"No. Early to-morrow forenoon."

"Very well."

And the tall young man was about to show the woman to the door, in his usual methodical fashion, when she paused, bit her lip reflectively, and finally said:

"I don't know but it would be as well to tell you something of my brother's peculiarities, so that you may be able the better to manage him."

"It would be as well, madam," replied Revere coldly.

"His mania was brought about in the first place by a theft of diamonds from an establishment where he was employed. The circumstances were such that it looked for a long time as if Millard were the thief. He ultimately succeeded in proving his innocence, but he had brooded over the matter so much in the mean time that his mind became affected."

"For long periods together he will appear perfectly rational, unless the subject of diamonds is broached, and then he becomes frantic—sometimes uncontrollable."

"This is a queer freak," observed Revere, calmly. "However, I have no doubt I can manage him."

"I trust so, and I shall be here by eleven o'clock to-morrow morning. Good-night, doc—sir, I mean."

"Good-night, madam!"

For a long time after Revere sat on the divan where he had seated himself, thinking.

"What can that woman be up to now?" he mused. "Nothing good, I'll warrant!"

"Can it be possible that she did not know me? Or was that a part of her game?"

The following morning, at precisely eleven, the same elegant equipage drove up to the Forest avenue mansion and the same lady alighted; but, on this occasion she was accompanied by a well-dressed, genteel young man of not more than nineteen or twenty.

As soon as they were ushered into the sitting-room, the lady said to the young man:

"Now let me have the case, and I will show the diamonds to my husband."

The young man took two jewel cases from his pocket and handed them over to the lady, who immediately made for the door.

At the door she met Revere.

"Good-morning, Doc—I mean Mr. Revere," she said hastily. "I have brought the patient," at the same time jerking her head in the direction of the young man, who was still standing in the middle of the floor of the sitting-room.

"Very well, madam," replied Revere, dryly, glancing through the door at the so-called patient. "I shall take charge of him."

"I trust you will, and I will leave him in your care, for I am in a great hurry this morning. I shall call again this afternoon, however, when we will have an opportunity of talking over the arrangements for the case of my poor brother."

And before the astonished man was aware of her intention, she pushed past him into the hall, and thence out of the street door.

Scarcely had the street door closed behind her, when the young man appeared to be seized with a violent fit of his malady, for he made a dash for the sitting-room door and tried to rush past Revere, at the same time crying out frantically:

"Give me those diamonds! Stop her! She has stolen my diamonds!"

Revere checked his progress with a gentle hand, and said in a quiet, admonishing tone:

"That's all right, young man. I'll see that you get your diamonds."

"But she has gone out of the house!" persisted the young man, striving frantically to get past the keeper. "She has gone to the carriage! I do not believe she is your wife."

"My wife?" gasped Revere, turning pale. "My God! I see it all now! Once more she

has made a cat's-paw of me! Why was I such a fool as not to have seen through her ruse in time?"

As he muttered these words he moved quickly to the window and looked out, but only to see the carriage rolling away at the top of the horses' speed.

Turning to the young man, who stood dumb with amazement, Revere said in a singularly calm voice:

"It is too late to attempt to foil her now, young man, but I shall catch her and restore the diamonds. Now tell me how it happened. Did she represent herself as my wife?"

"Yes, sir, and—"

The young man hesitated, being too much excited to proceed.

"Then how was it you concluded she was not my wife?" asked Revere.

"As soon as she took the cases of diamonds and started for the door, I felt that I had been robbed—that I had been made the victim of a plot—"

"To which you imagined I was a party," interrupted the keeper.

"Well, it did look a little that way," confessed the young man falteringly. "But—"

"I don't blame you," interrupted the other again. "But, tell me all about it. How did she manage it?"

"Why, sir," began the young man, "she came to my father's store, which is in Chicago now, and asked to look at some diamonds. The clerk showed her quite a number, and she finally appeared to become interested in two sets—ear-rings, brooch and necklace—which were exactly alike, except in the color of the stones—the stones of one set being blue and those of the other yellow. At length she said she would take one set, if we would send a clerk along with her to her house to let her husband decide which he preferred. At the same time she gave the clerk what she claimed was her husband's card. It was your card, sir."

"You don't tell!" ejaculated Revere. "However, she is capable of such a thing—or more if need be. Well?"

"The clerk did not care to take the responsibility of sending the goods, which are worth five thousand dollars a set, and consulted my father. My father looked at the card, and at once said it was all right, that he knew you, and called me to accompany the customer. Her carriage was at the door, and, putting the two cases of jewels into my pocket, I entered the carriage with her and was driven here. The rest you already know."

"Yes, I know the rest," sighed Revere, "and a clever job it was, altogether. The woman laid her plans well. She came here yesterday afternoon and made arrangements for me to take her brother for treatment. I might have known then that there was something wrong, for I have known this woman a long time, and knew her to be capable of any sort of villainy. But we shall overtake her. Tell your father that I shall do everything in my power to apprehend and bring this vicious creature to justice. By the way, you did not tell me who your father is?"

"My father's name is Jacob Sloan, and he is the head of the house of Jacob Sloan & Son."

"And you are the son, I presume?"

"Yes, sir."

"I know your father very well, Mr. Sloan, and wish you would assure him for me that I shall do all in my power to bring this wily she-devil to justice."

As soon as the young man had taken his departure, Revere retired to his private study, and was not seen to emerge therefrom during the remainder of the day.

About half an hour after the young jeweler's departure an old man, tall, bent of form and gray-bearded, left the house and walked as far as the nearest corner, where there was a hack standing. Entering the vehicle, he had himself driven to a certain number in Madison street, which proved to be an apartment house.

CHAPTER IV.

A WOMAN'S DEVILISH ART.

THE old gentleman glanced along the row of names on the bell-board in the vestibule of the apartment house, and, his eyes finally

alighting upon the right one, he touched the electric button directly beneath it.

The name was "Francis Percival."

"It's a lucky thing that I happen to know the name," mused the old gentleman, with a self-satisfied chuckle. "Another man might pass it a thousand times without suspecting who the owner was."

By this time the door opened with a click; the old gentleman entered the hallway, and immediately began the ascent of the stairs.

To the casual observer, there would have appeared to have been a lightness and springiness of step scarcely consistent with the whiteness of the man's hair and beard, for he mounted the three flights of stairs with an agility that would seem only to belong to youth and vigor.

On the top of the third flight the old gentleman found a door partially open, at which appeared a woman's face.

"Is Madam Percival in?" was asked.

"Yes," replied the woman, who was evidently a domestic. "Who shall I say?"

"Say that Doctor Rhodes would like to see her," answered the visitor promptly.

And when the servant had withdrawn to announce him, he chuckled to himself and muttered:

"That name, coupled with the description the girl will give of me, will arouse her curiosity to such a degree that she will not be able to resist the temptation of seeing me."

And his prediction proved correct, for a moment later, the domestic returned with an invitation for him to enter.

Winnifred Rayburn wore a puzzled expression when the gray-bearded old man entered the parlor where she waited to receive him.

The visitor indulged in a hearty laugh at her consternation, and then said:

"You do not appear to know me, Madam Percival, otherwise, Miss Winnifred Rayburn? It is a wonder that I should have recognized the name on the bell-board, and should not have done so, but for the fact that I happened to learn it some time ago."

All this time the woman stood staring at him in amazement; but her expression turned somewhat to indignation toward the conclusion of his speech.

"No, I do not know you," she said, at length, "and I shall have to ask you what you mean by coming into my house and addressing me in this manner."

"With great pleasure," returned the visitor affably, "although I am not surprised at your not recognizing me in this make-up, inasmuch as you did not recognize me in my true character, this morning."

With that he deliberately removed the gray wig and beard, and stood forth in his true character.

"Jules Revere!" gasped the woman, sinking back upon a seat. "By all that is devilish, what are you doing here?"

"Oh, you do recognize me now?" laughed the imperturbable Revere. "It is strange that you did not recognize me this morning."

"I did not, nevertheless; and that is the truth, if I ever uttered it," she said in tremulous tones, still pale and nervous.

"You have never burdened your soul much with truths," laughed Revere. "But do you mean to tell me seriously that you did not recognize me?"

"It is unnecessary for me to repeat that I did not," rejoined Winnifred, icily. "If I had, I certainly should not have chosen you as a cat's-paw again."

"I cannot understand it. You must have remembered the name at least."

"No; strange as it may seem, I did not. You see you had not used that name for a long time when I last saw you in France—"

"I know," interrupted Revere, bluntly, "but things have changed since then. At that time I was leading a life which I am now unable to look back to without a blush."

The woman laughed derisively.

"You mean to tell me then, that your pretended reformation is genuine and sincere?"

"Certainly!"

"I couldn't have believed it," she laughed. "But, inasmuch as you say so, it must be true. But, let us come to the point, Jules Revere: Why have you called?"

"Your question is somewhat superfluous,

inasmuch as you already know as well as I do."

"On the contrary, I have not the least idea what brought you here."

"Indeed?"

"Fact, I assure you."

"Well, then, I will tell you," he said, assuming a severe countenance. "Those diamonds you stole this morning must be returned to the owner, and that at once."

Again Winnifred Rayburn laughed.

"But, suppose I do not choose to return them?" she said in a defiant tone.

"In that case I shall turn you over to the police," he growled.

Another peal of derisive laughter.

"And you think to frighten me with any such threat?"

"I do not wish to frighten you, except to compel you to do your duty."

"You are not at all interested in the matter, of course? I mean personally."

"Well, yes, I am," admitted Revere, "to the extent that the man who was robbed being an intimate acquaintance, my own reputation will suffer somewhat, if the wrong is not righted."

"No further?"

"No further."

"You have no fear for the reputation of Madame Revere, then?"

"What do you mean?" he gasped, starting suddenly.

"It was she who went to the jewelry store on State street and ordered the diamonds, you know."

"I know that you are a liar!" he retorted, hotly. "I know, and so do you, that my wife had nothing to do with the transaction—in fact, does not know at this moment that any such transaction ever took place."

"As a fact, you and I know this," she confessed, with a light laugh, "but you will have some difficulty in making others believe it. You must remember that it was your card which was employed on that occasion."

"I am aware of that," he interposed, indignantly, "and that is the very reason I insist upon the diamonds being restored."

"But, how are you going to prove that it was not Madame Revere, but Winnifred Rayburn, who called at the store?"

"By having you arrested and brought before the man who was robbed, who will have no trouble in identifying you."

She laughed boisterously.

"A brilliant thought," she said, "but you have been a trifle slow about concealing it."

"How so?"

"Do you wish me to tell you?" she sneered.

"I do."

"Well, then, detectives, if not already on my track, will soon be. Realizing this fact, I have taken good care to have their steps directed toward your house. There they will meet my twin sister, Beatrice, otherwise Madame Revere. They will have a description of me from the jeweler. Now, do you not think it barely possible that Beatrice will suit the description well enough to warrant them in arresting her? And do you not think that, when brought before the jewelers for identification, they will recognize her as myself?"

"My God!" gasped Revere. "Devil that you are! I'll—but no, I shall beat you at your own game. I shall report you at once to the police, and when you are brought before the jeweler and the police justice, with your name, which is so well known to the police, I fancy there will be a different story to tell. The name of Winnifred Rayburn will be sufficient to hold you."

Again she indulged in that exasperating laugh.

"Fool!" she cried. "Do you imagine for a moment that I am not prepared for all such emergencies? Reference to last Tuesday's newspapers will show you that Winnifred Rayburn sailed from New York on the City of Paris for England, and is by this time in mid-ocean, and if you should succeed in executing your threat of arrest—which is not likely—neither the jewelers nor the police would recognize the woman whom you yourself have admitted more than once to be the greatest artist in the line of disguising the world had ever seen."

"Fiend!" cried Revere, making a spring toward the woman, intending to clutch her by the throat.

But, too quick for him, she sprung back and retreated through a door and closed and bolted it after her.

Revere stood for a moment staring blankly at the closed door, amazed and dumfounded, and then, realizing that he was at the end of his resources for the time being, he turned and left the flat.

His mind was in such a confused state that he hardly knew in what direction to proceed.

He would have got a policeman and gone back and had the woman arrested; but could not do this without first procuring a warrant, and he knew that before he could do this she would have time to make her escape, or at least disguise herself so that even he would not recognize her.

Revere finally decided to return home, especially as he just then recalled the woman's prediction about the detectives arresting his wife.

He entered the back, which he had kept waiting for him, again and ordered the driver to take him home, having previously restored the gray wig and beard to his head and face.

As he rode along, ruminating upon the recent events, his mind at length reverted to what the woman had said about the announcement in the newspapers that she had gone to England.

"This must have been a part of her preparation for the robbery," he mused. "That is, supposing that she told the truth about the matter."

And so curious and anxious did he become regarding the matter, at last, that, before reaching home, he stopped at a newsdealer's and, having succeeded in getting an *Inter-Ocean* of the day in question, turned to the passenger list of the City of Paris.

And he was treated to a double surprise.

Not only did he find the name of Winnifred Rayburn there, but also his own name, Jules Revere!

"What can this mean?" he mused. "Can it be that this infamous woman has been responsible for this, or is it a mere coincidence that some one of the same name has shipped on this steamer?"

He strove his utmost to believe it was the latter; but without success. He could but believe that the woman had been responsible for the name being there, and that there was some dark plot behind it. What it could be he could not surmise, but the thought filled him with apprehension.

In this state of mind Jules Revere reached home at last.

Here he found a greater surprise in store for him.

The household was in a wild state of confusion, and when he inquired the cause, he found that the detectives had been there, as Winnifred Rayburn had prophesied, and, as his wife, who was the twin sister of Winnifred, and her exact image, and therefore corresponded with the description they had of her, Madame Revere had been arrested and dragged to prison.

CHAPTER V.

GOOD PIPING. THE FIRST LIGHT.

THE moment Burr set eyes upon the superscription of the letter, and compared the chirography with that of the letter taken from the trunk, he was satisfied they were both written by the same person, and that the person was a woman.

"I say, barkeeper," he said, "I'd give a good deal to see the inside of this letter."

"I couldn't let you open it, though," returned the barkeeper promptly. "It'd be as much as my neck is worth to do a thing like that."

"But suppose I opened it by mistake, you understand—and marked it 'opened by mistake'?"

"Say!" cried the mixer of beverages, eyeing the detective sharply and scowling somewhat, "you seem to take a good deal of interest in this duck. What is there in it; and who are you, anyway?"

Thad hesitated.

He hardly knew whether to trust the fellow or not; but, after looking him over, he finally concluded that he could.

Beckoning the barkeeper to one side, he began, first exhibiting his badge:

"I feel that I can trust you with a secret, but I must ask you to keep what I tell you strictly to yourself."

"You can trust me, colonel," returned the other; "whatever you tell me goes no further."

"I believe it," assented Thad, earnestly, "otherwise I shouldn't tell you. This fellow is suspected of committing a terrible crime."

"You don't say!" gasped the fellow. "What was it?"

"Murder," answered Thad, impressively. "Who was the party?" questioned the barkeeper.

And Thad concluding that he had let him deeply enough into the secret, replied calmly:

"That is a point we have not been able to make out yet. It was a room-mate, but we haven't discovered who he was."

The barkeeper reflected a moment and then said:

"Well, I reckon under the circumstances there won't be any harm in letting you take the letter, but mind, if he ever calls for it—"

"If he ever calls for it," interrupted Thad, "give it to him, and explain that it was opened by mistake."

"Oh, you don't want to keep it, then?" cried the barkeeper, with an expression of relief.

"Certainly not."

Thad here cut the envelope and drew out the inclosure. It ran as follows:

"DEAR PERCY:—

"What are you doing with the lamb? It takes you a long time to do a little business. If you don't do something pretty soon, I shall have to try my hand once more, although I had hoped never to be compelled to fall into it again."

"If necessity compels, I have a trick in mind which will throw anything we have ever done before into the shade in the matter of brilliancy of conception and cleverness of execution."

"I have just learned that J. R. has returned to this country and is doing the doctor act, and pretends to cure insanity, or something of that sort."

"Once more urging you to hasten your job, I remain, as ever, faithfully,

WINN."

There was no address given in connection with the letter, but the post-mark on the envelope was Chicago.

By the time he had finished the perusal of this missive, Burr's mind was satisfied upon two points.

One was that Francis Percival and the man who registered at the Chicago hotel as Jules Revere were one and the same.

The other was, that the writer of the letter was a woman, and a very subtle one at that.

The thing that puzzled him, though, was how this letter and the one from the New York diamond merchant happened to be written by the same person.

And then, when he came to think the matter over, he concluded that he might have been mistaken on this point.

Another thing that worried him was to know who J. R. was.

But, scarcely had this question presented itself before he turned over in his diary to the note he had made from the entry in the register of the United States Hotel.

"Jules Revere," he read. "This is strange," he mused, "that is supposing this 'J. R.' to stand for Jules Revere. How came this rascal to use the same name?"

Thad then made a copy of the letter in his diary, and, after writing "opened by mistake" across the end of the envelope, replaced the letter and returned it to the barkeeper, at the same time slipping him a five dollar bill.

"Find what you wanted?" the barkeeper inquired.

"Not quite," replied Burr, starting to leave the bar-room. "By the way," he suddenly hesitated, "do you think it would be possible for you to learn this fellow's St. Louis address?"

"I hardly think so," returned the barkeeper. "I imagine his address was in his hat, by his having his mail sent here."

"Did he ever have any letters sent here before?"

"No, but the fact of his having this one sent here—"

"Showed that he did not want his real address known," supplemented Thad. "However, if you could discover, by any hook or crook, where the chap hung out, it would be worth a hundred to you."

"Thanks. I'll see what I can do."

Burr then gave him the name and address of the Chicago chief of police, and took his leave.

After partaking of breakfast, of which he was much in need, the detective hastened back to the Union Depot, and reached it in time to catch the 9:20 train for Chicago, and at exactly 7:30 that evening he had covered the three hundred miles and was back in the Lake City again.

After calling upon the chief of police and reporting what he had accomplished by his trip to St. Louis, Thad repaired to his hotel.

Here in his room he once more went over the subject of the letter he had found in the Southern Hotel bar-room.

He had not neglected to note that the post-mark on the envelope showed that it had been posted at sub-station "K," which he knew must be on the west side of the city, in the vicinity of Washington Park.

More out of a spirit of adventure than a hope of accomplishing anything, he left the hotel, late in the afternoon, and boarded a west-bound Randolph street car, and rode as far out as Washington Park.

Here he alighted, inquired the way to the sub-station, and at once made his way to it. Calling the agent to one side, and showing him the copy of the letter, and informing him that he was a detective, Burr demanded to know if he (the agent) could recall any woman whose name the initials "F. P." would fit.

The agent reflected for some time, but could recall no woman whose name began with those initials.

"In fact," said he, "the only person I can recall with those initials who gets mail here is a man."

"What is his name?" inquired the detective.

"Francis Percival," replied the agent.

"And his address?" questioned Thad, after making a note of the name.

"Oh, you know we are not allowed to give the address of any one," returned the agent promptly. "However, you might obtain it by dropping him a postal-card."

Thad followed the suggestion, dropped the said Francis Percival a postal-card, in which he claimed to be a distant relative, requested the man's address and signed the card "Edward Percival, formerly of New York."

When he had mailed this the detective referred to the Directory in the hope of finding the name, but was disappointed; no such name was there.

At the end of his resources now, he concluded to return to the hotel; but just as he was about leaving the office a man came in, approaching one of the private lock-boxes, unlocked the box and took out some mail.

Thad could not have told what prompted him to do it, aside from his eagerness to find some trace of the man for whom he was in search, but as soon as this person took his mail from the box the detective slouched up to him in a careless manner, pretended not to see him and ran against him, knocking the package, letters and papers, from his hand.

Thad pretended to be terribly mortified at the blunder, apologized, and stooping, picked the fallen package up and handed it to the man.

In doing so he took note of the superscription on some of the envelopes, and was greatly surprised to find it to be "Francis Percival!"

The man exhibited no agitation, accepted the apology and the package, and walked away.

The New Yorker was rendered a trifle nervous by the incident, but quickly recovered himself, and was on the sidewalk before the fellow had proceeded far, and, strolling indifferently along, kept him in sight.

As he went along the detective took note

and drew a mental picture of his man, so that he would be able to identify him on any future occasion.

He was a short, fairly stout man, with a solid, compact figure. His features were refined, and his hands and feet as diminutive and shapely as those of a refined woman.

"Can it be possible," mused Burr, "that this is the identical person who called at the hotel this afternoon, disguised as a woman? The fellow's build, carriage, and everything, even to the shape of his hands and feet, are favorable to the theory."

After walking for some distance along Washington street Percival turned into Washington Park.

It had grown almost dark by this time, and, with the additional shadows of the trees along the magnificent avenue, it was difficult to discern more than the outlines of the now occasional pedestrians who hurried along the walks, or the few loiterers who still occupied the seats.

Percival apparently was in no hurry to leave the Park, however, and after strolling leisurely along for some distance, seated himself upon one of the benches.

Thad slouched along to within a few yards of where the man had seated himself, and took a seat.

The shadowed man had apparently not noticed him, and the detective had succeeded in getting near enough to watch his actions.

Percival appeared to be expecting some one, as he kept his head moving from side to side, as if watching the approach from both directions.

This had gone on for some half an hour, when, at length, a tall, slender man came slowly along the path, passed the detective, and continued straight ahead, without looking to the right or left.

It was too dark for Thad to make out more than the outlines of the tall man, and as he gave him no particular thought, it is questionable whether the detective would have taken any further notice of him, but for a particular circumstance.

The tall man had, seemingly, paid as little attention to Percival as he had to Thad, and was bent on pushing straight on, but, just as he had gotten a few steps past the man in the seat, the latter uttered a peculiar low whistle.

The pedestrian instantly paused, glanced around in the direction of the signaler, and suddenly walked back and seated himself beside him.

Thad, keenly alive now, longed to be close enough to hear their conversation, but realized that it would be impossible to approach any nearer, without attracting their attention, and was compelled to sit where he was, watching their movements.

The men remained in deep converse for fully an hour; then they arose and walked away together—Thad shadowing at a discreet distance.

They left the Park from the Randolph street side, and, reaching the street, turned west.

A few blocks' walk brought them to the Boulevard. Turning into this, they kept along it for two blocks, and then struck into Madison street.

Half a dozen doors from the corner they disappeared in the entrance of a large apartment house of the better class.

Thad was only a few paces behind them when they entered the vestibule, and saw the short man put a latch-key into the door, open it, and the pair disappeared within.

At once Burr stepped into the vestibule, and, by the light of the great swinging lamp, read the names on the bell-board.

Almost the first one he came to was "Madame Percival."

A thrill went through the great Vidocq. He had encountered the name and its owner on a former occasion!

Stepping into the shadow beside the stoop, he waited, in the hope that one of the men might appear again.

An hour went by; then the door opened and the tall man came out.

CHAPTER VI.

IN CLOSE QUARTERS.

THE tall man walked briskly away toward the Boulevard, and there hailed a passing

cab, and in another moment was rolling away in a northerly direction.

Luckily, another cab was at hand, and this the detective secured.

Giving the driver directions to keep the other cab in sight, the pursuit commenced.

Along the Boulevard the two vehicles rattled for more than a mile; then the one in the lead turned west.

A few more blocks were covered, when they reached Forest avenue, where, near the corner of the street, the tall man's cab halted and he alighted.

Thad noticed that the house he was about to enter was a large and extremely plain structure, wholly out of keeping with its neighbors.

As the tall man ascended the stoop and was about to enter the house, Thad, who had already alighted, hurried after him.

The shadowed man noticing that he was being followed, turned and faced the detective as he came up the stoop.

Thad was a little confused by this unexpected action, and found himself at a loss for words with which to address the man.

The other, on the contrary, appeared to be remarkably cool and collected, and, as the detective hesitated, asked, in a calm tone of voice:

"Do you wish to see me, sir?"

"Yes," replied Burr, recovering his calmness with his wonted readiness, "I should like to have a few words with you, if you please."

"Certainly," returned the tall man politely. "Come in, sir!"

With which he unlocked the door and entered, and was closely followed by the detective.

The man walked straight into the reception room, and, as the light was turned low, turned it up, and then addressing himself to Burr, said:

"Be seated, sir."

Thad complied and the other followed his example, seating himself upon a low chair directly in front of his visitor.

"What do you wish to speak to me about?" he asked.

Thad was still a trifle puzzled as to the manner of beginning what he realized to be a delicate subject, but soon pulled himself together and began:

"You will doubtless be astonished when you learn the nature of my errand, sir, and if I am at fault, I trust you will pardon me."

"Well?" returned the other as Thad came to a pause.

"I am in search of a person by the name of Francis Percival," pursued Burr—

"What do you want with him?" quickly interrupted the tall man.

"That I will tell you later on," replied Thad calmly. "If I am not mistaken you were in his company to-night, sir."

"You are not mistaken, sir," said the other, still coolly. "I was with him."

"Pardon the question, but may I ask what sort of a man he is?"

"In what respect?"

"As to character."

"He is a perfect gentleman, sir," responded the tall man spiritedly. "A perfect gentleman."

"He has never, to your knowledge, been mixed up in any unsavory or questionable transactions has he?"

"Never."

"It would be needless to ask, then, if he has ever, under any circumstances, used a pseudonym or alias?"

"It certainly would," retorted the tall man indignantly. "Being a gentleman, as I tell you, he could not possibly do such a thing."

"Except, possibly, by way of a lark?"

"Oh, as to that," returned the tall man affably, "any of us might do that."

"Has he, or did he ever have, so far as you are aware, a friend by the name of Langford—Stephen B. Langford?"

"Not that I know of."

"You never heard him speak of any one of that name?"

"Never."

"Is your friend in the habit of going to St. Louis once in a while?"

Instead of answering this last question the tall man stared his questioner straight in the eye for several seconds, and at length asked in a brusque voice:

"See here, sir, I do not know why you should come here and ask me all these questions, or why I should answer them, until you have first told me who you are. Who are you, anyway? A detective?"

Thad saw there was nothing to be gained by concealment, and bluntly replied:

"Yes, I am a detective."

"You suspect my friend of some crime, then?" intimated the other, in a milder tone.

"From appearances it looks as though it might be so," responded Thad, guardedly.

"Appearances may be against him, in which case an investigation can do him no harm."

After a little reflection, the tall man said:

"That is true. Vindication can never harm an innocent man. Go on."

"You did not answer my last question," resumed the shadower.

"No? I forget what it was now. What did you ask me?"

"I asked you if Percival was in the habit of visiting St. Louis?"

"Yes, he goes over there now and then," was the reply.

"Stops a week or so sometimes, eh?"

"Well, yes, I have known him to stop over for a week."

"He was over there about two weeks ago, I believe, and remained up to about a week ago?"

"I cannot say as to that," answered the tall man slowly and in a musing tone.

"You see, to tell you the truth, I haven't seen much of him for the past year until a day or two ago."

Thad hesitated a moment, and then drew out his diary.

Turning over its pages for some time, he at length stopped at a certain memorandum, and asked:

"Who is Winn?"

"Winn?" echoed the other, with a troubled brow.

"Yes; while in St. Louis, or rather, I should say, after he had left there, a letter arrived addressed to Percival, in care of the Southern Hotel bar-room. It was evidently written by a woman, and was signed 'Winn.' Do you know of any one—any woman who is a friend of his—by that name, sir?"

Burr had kept his eyes fixed upon the man's face during the whole time he was speaking, and could but wonder at the strange and rapid changes which his countenance underwent during so brief a period.

He first grew deathly pale; then, as suddenly he flushed scarlet.

At first he appeared to be seized with a fit of terror, but this quickly gave place to anger, and amidst it all a terrible struggle appeared to be going on within.

At length he replied, abruptly:

"No, I do not know any one of that name, and," here he suddenly rose to his feet, "upon the whole, sir, your questions are impertinent, and such as I do not feel called upon to answer. Therefore I must demand that the interview come to an end at once."

"Very well," rejoined Thad calmly, rising. "I cannot compel you to answer my questions, and it is therefore useless to ask them. But you appear to forget what you remarked about an honest man not being affected by vindication."

"The interview is at an end!" sternly answered the tall man, glancing significantly at the door.

"Just one more question," implored the detective, "and I'm off."

"The interview is at an end!" repeated the other with increased sternness, this time pointing toward the door.

"As you say," acquiesced Thad, moving in the direction of the door. "You may alter your mind later, and conclude to answer my questions, if not to me, at least to somebody else. Good-night!"

Burr hurried from the room, and the tall man, without uttering a word, followed him to the street door, and closed and bolted it after him.

When the detective reached the stoop, he found that the rain had begun to fall. It was one of those steady, sullen rains, peculiar to Chicago, which drives straight down, in determined, icy shafts that penetrate to the very marrow. Thad paused before plung-

ing out into it, being unprovided with an umbrella, and as he did so, cast his eyes about at his surroundings.

A lantern swung from the ceiling of the vestibule, and by its uncertain light, he discerned a sign on the jamb of the outer door.

At first he could not make out what it was, and drew closer. Finally, by long studying and taking advantage of the fitful flashes of the lantern, he made out the name.

"Jules Revere!" he almost gasped. "Is it possible that I have been talking all this time to that man, without knowing it?"

As he stood there, a dark figure came around the corner of the house and passed out of the gate.

Thad was luckily concealed in the shadow, so that, whoever the person was, he did not appear to have noticed the detective's presence.

On the other hand, the darkness was so intense that the detective was unable to discern what the person was like.

Nevertheless, as soon as the figure had got outside the yard, and started along the avenue, Thad was on his track.

To his surprise and consternation, the mysterious person strode directly up to the cab which Thad had kept waiting for himself, and, unceremoniously entering it, was driven away.

But, the New Yorker's resourceful mind came to his aid in time, and before the vehicle had more than started he had mounted on behind!

"Now drive to kingdom come, if you like," he chuckled to himself; "I am with you wherever you go."

The cab dashed on at a furious speed, and, owing to the darkness and the many turnings of the vehicle, the out-rider soon lost all reckoning of where he was being carried, until the cab finally stopped, and he found himself in front of the United States Hotel!

The person inside hastily alighted and entered the hostelry, and of course, the shadower was not far behind.

The fellow, who, the detective saw by this time, was not the tall man, did not stop in the common room, but pushed straight on into the bar.

Burr slouched along a little way in his wake.

The bar-room, one of the lowest and toughest in Canal street, that region of tough dives, was filled with a noisy crowd of as villainous a looking lot of cut-throats as the detective had ever beheld.

The man whom Thad had followed urged his way into this ill-favored mob, and approached a brace of the most vicious and murderous looking of the lot.

The New Yorker saw that the man himself was slight and well-dressed, and appeared oddly out of place in this quarter.

He whispered something hastily to the two burly ruffians, and instantly their eyes were turned in the direction of the detective!

Burr did not know the meaning of fear, but he never lost sight of discretion, and realized at a glance that he was placed at the double disadvantage of being recognized in a crowd of that character, and of being overwhelmed with numbers.

So, to beat a retreat while opportunity offered was the better part of valor.

He turned toward the door through which he had entered, but was met by another pair of ruffians, about as bloodthirsty in appearance as the pair to whom the little man had spoken.

"Whur yer goin'?" growled one of the ruffians, putting up his fists menacingly.

By way of answer, Thad shot out with his fist with the suddenness of a flash of lightning, and the force of a catapult, and the fellow went down in a lump.

In a twinkling the other ruffian was in front of him and made a vicious pass at the detective's head, but the undaunted Burr parried the blow and landed on the fellow's jugular, sending him reeling to the floor.

In an instant the two villains to whom the little man had spoken elbowed their way through the crowd and were upon the solitary detective.

Nor was this the worst; the entire mob surrounded him, each villainous member eager to get a punch at him.

CHAPTER VII.

IN DESPERATE STRAITS.

WHEN Jules Revere discovered that his wife had been arrested in lieu of the diamond thief, he was beside himself with rage.

He knew that it would do no good for him to go to the police court, as he could avail nothing in that direction, so he hurried with all speed back to the Percival flat with the hope of finding Francis Percival at home, believing that he could prevail on him to help him out of his dilemma.

But, when he reached the flat he not only did not find Percival there, but he also found that Winnifred Rayburn, had disappeared.

He subsequently ascertained that Percival had gone to St. Louis.

This, it will be remembered, was a day or two previous to Thad's visit to the latter city.

Revere was unable to prove the *alibi* for his wife, so there was nothing to be done but to secure bondsmen and get her admitted to bail.

Thus matters stood at the time of Thad's visit to Revere's house.

The account of the diamond robbery and the arrest was published in all the papers, but as the name of Mrs. Revere was given as Winnifred Rayburn, Thad, who read the account, did not for an instant suspect that the parties were the same as those he was after.

And that is why he thought nothing strange of the occurrence when he saw the two men in company.

Having seen them together, and no longer doubting that Percival was the man who registered at the United States Hotel, and was therefore the man who had shipped the body in the trunk, he did not doubt but that Revere was an accomplice.

Meantime Thad, through his zeal to discover a real clue, had followed the unknown man from Revere's house, and in so doing had walked into a trap which appeared to have been prepared for him.

When he found himself surrounded by the mob, he knew that his life depended upon some of the hardest fighting he had ever done.

Even then the chances of victory were extremely unpromising.

However, he struck with both fists, first to his right and then to his left; and every time his fists shot out some one went down.

This only had the effect of maddening the brutes, and with a terrific yell they rushed upon him with renewed energy.

The strain was dreadful, and he soon found his strength going.

His case was, indeed, desperate; something must be done.

Meanwhile, those in the rear encouraged the others by keeping up a continuous yell.

"Let him have it!"

"Kill de cursed beak!"

"Knock his head off!"

"Knife 'im!"

And many other similar appeals, which were intended to instill fresh vigor into the combatants.

At length the detective saw his opportunity, and, making a backward spring, succeeded in placing himself with his back against the wall.

Then with a movement as quick as lightning, he drew both of his revolvers and leveled them at the surging, yelling mob.

"Back!" he thundered in a voice that rung above the dreadful din. "Back! or I'll massacre the lot of you!"

There was a momentary lull; the mob had shrunk back and stood regarding this remarkable man with awe and terror.

A glance at that calm face with its firm-set mouth and piercing eyes, was enough to convince the most desperate character that he was not to be trifled with.

Then gradually there arose a hum of voices, and as it grew in volume Thad could distinguish such words as:

"What's de matter wid everybody?"

"Air ye all paralyzed?"

"Ain't nobody got a gun?"

"Why don't somebody plug the sunfish?"

During it all Thad stood, cool and defiant, his keen eye moving quickly about over the crowd, watching for the first move toward obeying the suggestions.

But no one seemed inclined to take the

initiative, but suddenly some person, with no more courage than the rest, yet with a trifle more zeal apparently, managed to clandestinely fire a shot at the brave man. The ball whistled in unpleasant proximity to his head and buried itself in the wall behind him.

But, it was a fatal shot for the offender, for the blaze of his pistol revealed his location, and, almost on the instant came a second report, and the mistaken man uttered a shriek of pain and reeled to the floor.

This seemed to strike terror to the rest of the crowd, and, taking advantage of their panic, the detective decided to slip out of the room and make his escape. But, the instant this move was made the mob seemed to regain courage, for once more they raised the yell and rushed upon him like so many infuriated beasts.

Some blocked the door to prevent his exit, and others stormed him from behind.

But, Thad Burr never, for a moment, lost his presence of mind, and seeing that he could not escape, he again backed up against the wall determined to bring matters to a climax forthwith.

"Back!" he thundered, leveling his revolvers. "Back! or by heaven I'll fire!"

But the furious mob only howled the louder.

"Who's afeered of yer?" yelled one.

"Don't let 'im bluff yer ag'in," shouted another.

"Why don't some one plug him ag'in, and do it right this time?" demanded a third.

"That's right, bore 'im!" shouted still another.

"Back!" cried Thad again. "One more minute, and some of you will bite the dust."

This was met with a shout of derision, and some one retorted, authoritatively:

"At him, men! Down him! What are ye afraid of? Kill the cursed sleuth!"

At this command the mob made another move forward but at the same moment came the defiance:

"The minute is up! Now look out for yourselves!"

Bang! bang! bang!

Three shots from each of the brave man's revolvers in rapid succession, and with each report arose the frantic yell of some wretch who had felt the sting of cold lead.

Panic-stricken and terrified, the crowd fell back, pell-mell, over tables and chairs, and over one another, trampling those who had fallen, who, in turn, howled with pain and rent the air with curses.

Now was Thad's opportunity of escape, and he did not neglect it.

Gliding swiftly to the door through which the ruffians were now crowding in their terror, he pushed his way along with the rest, without attracting attention.

In another moment he was on the street and breathed freely again.

"Well," he mused, "that was a little the closest call I ever had, but I'm out of it, thank goodness!"

Then for the first time since the beginning of the melee he thought of the little man whom he had followed to the place.

"I wonder what became of him," he mused. "It can't be that I plugged him in my promiscuous shooting."

But, just at that instant, three men issued from the hotel front door, and darted across the street, and one of the three was the little fellow.

Of course Thad pursued, and kept them in sight.

The night was exceedingly dark and the rain still falling. The race led toward the river, and the further they proceeded in this direction, the darker Thad found the way.

The three at length reached the river, and entered the tunnel which runs under the great sewer at this point.

It was a hazardous thing to follow such characters, into that long, lonesome, dimly-lighted passage at that hour of the night; but it was not more dangerous than the ordeal he had just passed; so, quickening his pace, he pushed on after the men.

Although the light was dim, it was strong enough to distinguish the figure of a person for a considerable distance, and the detective had not proceeded far when the three, as if suspicious of pursuit, turned and looked

back. Seeing the lone pedestrian made them quicken their pace and they all pushed on hurriedly.

Thus matters continued until the detective was nearly half-way through the tunnel, and the three men were considerably more.

Then, suddenly, Thad was startled at the sound of footsteps behind as of a body of men walking at a rapid speed.

He glanced back and to discover at least a dozen villainous-looking fellows coming at a fast walk, and did not doubt that they were a contingent of the other crowd, and were in pursuit of him!

A glance to the front seemed to prove this, for the three had stopped and were looking back.

The mob in the rear, uttering a yell, now quickened their pace to a run. Brave, resolute, undaunted Thad, always ready for desperate emergencies, determined to sell his life as dearly as possible.

Having taken the precaution to slip fresh cartridges into the chambers of his revolvers, he drew the little guns, and backing up against the tunnel wall on one side, awaited the onslaught.

CHAPTER VIII.

A WOMAN TO DREAD.

As soon as Jules Revere had closed the door on the detective he returned to the sitting-room, and for a full hour paced the floor in a nervous state.

"What shall I do? What shall I do?" he muttered. "She is determined I shall not lead an honest life. She has followed me clean around the world, and still dogs my steps. I had hoped that she would never find me here, but, just as I began to feel secure, she must needs drop down upon me, and now that Beatrice is under bonds, and will be brought to trial, my past life, with all of its hideousness, will be laid bare to the world."

He stopped suddenly, struck his forehead with his clinched fist, and exclaimed:

"Yes, it is the only way. There is no use of dodging and running any longer. I must face it. From this forward it is fight! By Heaven! I'll beat her at her own game! I shall meet her cunning with cunning! I shall show her that there are subtle people in the world besides herself. I'll—"

His soliloquy was interrupted by a peal of laughter so close to him that he started violently, and turned to face the intruder.

A puzzled expression spread over his face, as he stared at the author of the peal of laughter.

And, no wonder.

Standing before him was a tall, slender old woman, her hair of such snowy whiteness, and her face so seamed and wrinkled with age, that she might easily have been taken for ninety or even a hundred.

As she stood there, grinning at him, she leaned upon a crutch, and he could see that her emaciated form shook with palsy.

The man was stricken dumb.

If the Angel Gabriel had stood before him, he could not have been more puzzled or perplexed.

Then the dreadful silence was broken by a repetition of that nerve-startling laugh.

"You don't seem to recognize me, Jules Revere?" at length spoke the strange visitor.

Revere's face underwent a sudden and radical change.

From wonder and awe, it had become a picture of rage and consternation.

"Winnifred Rayburn! by all that is devilish!" he muttered. "What are you doing here?"

"I thought you would not recognize me in this disguise," she laughed, disregarding his question.

"What are you doing here?" he again demanded, fiercely. "What do you want, anyway?"

She uttered a little laugh, and deliberately seating herself in a chair, answered:

"I want to talk to you. Pray be seated!"

Revere sunk mechanically into a seat near the woman, and growled:

"Well?"

"You have seen him since, have you?"

"Yes," was the surly response.

"What had he to say?"

"Very little about that."
 "He confessed nothing, then?"
 "Not a word."
 "Did you press him?"
 "Not directly."
 "Why?"
 "I saw it was no use," he said impatiently. "My only alternative was to play about the subject, with the hope of betraying him into some sort of damaging admission."
 "But even that was a failure?"
 "Yes. He was too wary."
 "Did you say anything to him about what had happened here?"
 "He already knew all about it."
 "He did?" she cried in some surprise.
 "Yes."
 "What did he say about it?"
 "Very little. He said it was characteristic of you, and what he could have expected."
 "Did he say he desired to see me?" she asked.
 "He said that he would see you, and we went to your flat for that purpose."
 "But you did not find me?"
 "No."
 "What did he want to see me about?"
 "He said he would compel you to make such disclosures as would result in the liberation of Beatrice."
 The woman laughed derisively.
 "Compel me to make disclosures, eh?" she laughed. "That is very good!"
 "Would you have refused?"
 Again she laughed.
 "When I make any disclosures," she replied, "it will be the worse for him—and somebody else."
 "You are in possession of facts, then?"
 "Yes, enough to—"
 She hesitated, and then suddenly asked:
 "Where is Beatrice?"
 It was now Revere's turn to assume the aggressive.
 "She is where neither you nor the authorities can come at her," he declared.
 "What do you mean?"
 "Just what I said. She is beyond the reach of any of you, and if anybody suffers for your crime, it will be yourself."
 "You have sent her away, then?"
 "Yes."
 A cloud of disappointment darkened the woman's face.
 Revere recognized it, and followed up his advantage with another taunt.
 "Did I not say I should meet your cunning with cunning, your subtlety with equal subtlety?"
 The woman regarded him with an expression of mingled scorn and pity for an instant and then replied:
 "You presume to cope with me in the matter of cunning and subtlety? You amaze me, Jules Revere—you do, indeed! Why, you are an infant in finesse."
 "You may imagine so," he retorted, his cheeks burning with indignation under her scorn. "You may have occasion to change your mind before very long."
 "You amuse me," was her only response.
 "Perhaps you will cease to be amused before I am through with you."
 "Yes?" she sneered.
 "Listen," he commanded, controlling his temper with a great effort. "There has been a detective here to-night. He put a series of questions to me which convinced me that he is in possession of facts, which with a word or two from me, will completely unearth certain mysteries. I gave him no satisfaction at the time, but that is not saying what I may do if I am forced to it."
 Winnifred Rayburn laughed derisively.
 "You would peach, then, under favorable circumstances?" she suggested.
 "I do not know why I should not," was the retort.
 "What would it avail you?"
 "I would at least rid myself of those who persist in haunting me and preventing me from leading the life of an honest man."
 "Then you should have begun earlier."
 "That is true, I should—before I ever met you—or him. Still, it is not yet too late, and I shall make the effort."
 "I am inclined to think you will find it is too late, Jules Revere," she averred solemnly.
 "How so?" he questioned apprehensively.

"You should have begun at least before the beginning of this affair."
 "What do you mean?"
 "Listen to me this time, and I will tell you."
 She hesitated as if uncertain how to begin, and then resumed:
 "You say this detective is in possession of certain facts?"
 "He is."
 "With regard to the murder of Stephen Langford?"
 Revere shuddered visibly, but finally replied:
 "Yes."
 "And perhaps with regard to the great diamond robbery? You see," she went on, in a business-like way, "I speak plainly because I do not wish that there should be any misunderstanding between us. The detective, I say, knows something, possibly, relating to the great diamond robbery."
 "I cannot say that he does, but—"
 "A word from you would suffice to enlighten him on that subject, eh?" she interrupted.
 "Yes, I fancy it would," he responded, with a desperate effort at firmness.
 Jules Revere began to realize the truth of her assertion that he was but an infant in the hands of this beautiful devil.
 "And under the circumstances and provocations," she went on, "you might be induced to speak this fatal word?"
 "I might," he confessed.
 "I am glad that we understand each other," she commented with the utmost coolness. "It is always best. Now, among his other information, does this erudite detective happen to know who went to the cheap west-side hotel and made arrangements for having the trunk brought there?"
 Revere started. He knew nothing about this part of the story, although it had all come out in the newspapers. He was not a close reader of the newspapers, and it had escaped his attention.
 "No," he replied, his voice quavering slightly.
 The woman took a newspaper clipping from her purse and handed it to him.
 She had marked one paragraph with ink, and called his attention to it.
 "Read the paragraph between the marks," she commanded.
 Revere ran his eyes over the lines, and groaned:
 "My God! how did this happen?"
 The paragraph read:
 "The day previous the arrival of the trunk, a well-dressed man called at the hotel, secured a room, and made arrangements for the trunk, upon its arrival, to be taken to the room, the stranger signifying his intention of being absent for two days. He registered his name as 'Jules Revere.'"
 "You see," smiled the woman, "in the event of your divulging any secrets, there might be such a thing as the detective noticing the coincidence of the two names being identical, although of course it was not you who called at the hotel."
 "Fiend!" he shrieked, jumping to his feet.
 "Keep cool!" she admonished in a calm voice. "There is another matter I should like to call your attention to."
 "What is that?"
 "As I mentioned on a former occasion, the shipping lists show that Winnifred Rayburn has sailed for England. This, as you know, is not true, but the police are looking out for her on the other side. Beatrice Revere has actually sailed. Well, she might suit the description of Winnifred Rayburn."

CHAPTER IX.

THE DEFORMED TRANSFORMED.

JULES REVERE, overwhelmed by these revelations, was unable to speak, and paced the floor in a state of silent frenzy.
 Winnifred Rayburn watched him with evident satisfaction for some moments, but at length resumed:
 "You were a little surprised to find that I knew where Beatrice had gone, were you not?"
 "I am surprised at nothing done or conceived by you, Winnifred," snarled Revere

"I should not be surprised to see you call up the spirits of perdition for I begin to think you really are in league with his Satanic Majesty."
 "Not quite so bad as that, Jules," she retorted, with a laugh. "However, I can tell you some other things which might astonish you."
 Revere stopped abruptly in his walking, stared at the woman for an instant and then resumed his walk.
 "You spoke of a detective being here," continued Winnifred. "You imagined, in telling me this, that you were furnishing me a piece of news. I knew it as soon as you did."
 "Impossible!" avowed Revere, stopping in front of her again.
 "Why impossible?" she demanded.
 "Nobody could have known it except the detective and myself."
 "You think that, do you? Now listen, and see whether I do not convince you that there was at least one other that knew it."
 She then went on to describe the meeting between himself and Thad, even to the minutest detail, including everything that had been said by either.
 He listened spell-bound and speechless.
 "Furthermore," she pursued, "I know every movement made by the detective after leaving here."
 Revere glared at her, but did not speak.
 "A certain person whom you did not know was anywhere near your house, but was here all the time, left here about the same time the detective did, and the detective, seeing him leave the house, followed him."
 She then related in detail Thad's ride on the tail of the cab and his subsequent experience in the hotel bar-room and the tunnel, and concluded with:
 "He is likely to call upon you again very soon, and then you will have an opportunity of telling him what you know of the great diamond robbery. But you won't do it, will you, my dear friend?" she broke off with a tone of mock endearment.
 "Why will I not?" he retorted, with another effort at firmness.
 "Because you dare not!" she uttered tauntingly. "For the same reason that you refused to tell him anything before, and you will order him from your house, just as you did then."
 "No, I'll be cursed if I do!" cried Revere. "I'll tell him everything this time."
 "Oh, no, you won't!" she smiled, and in the same bantering tone. "He might make some other discoveries, which would be unpleasant to yourself and others dear to you."
 At that moment the door-bell rung.
 "I wonder who can be coming at this hour of night?" asked Revere, consulting his watch. "It is nearly two o'clock."
 "Some prospective patient, perhaps," suggested the woman, derisively.
 "Very probable!" growled Revere.
 "Or, possibly, that astute detective," she suggested, laughingly.
 A servant knocked at the door, and when admitted announced that there was an old gentleman at the door, who wished to see the "doctor" on urgent business.
 "They persist in calling you doctor, Jules," and Winnifred laughed merrily at the idea.
 "Show him in!" commanded Revere.
 Revere had had a happy thought just at that moment.
 He had hoped that this late-hour caller would be the detective, and his desire was to usher him into the room before Winnifred could make her escape, and then expose her and turn her over to Thad.
 He, therefore, expected to see the woman beat a precipitate retreat; but, to his surprise, she kept her seat and continued to smile placidly.
 Revere was disappointed when the visitor entered to find him a very old and decrepit man, well-dressed, and evidently well-to-do.
 The visitor glanced at the "old lady" sitting at the opposite end of the room, and asked in a low tone:
 "Had we not better go into a private apartment, doctor?"
 "It will not be worth while," answered Revere. "The old lady is a patient of mine, and besides being demented is as deaf as a post."
 The stranger still appeared to be not quite

satisfied; but, after taking another look at the supposed old lady, he turned to the "doctor."

"You receive insane patients for treatment here, I believe?" he asked.

"I do," returned Revere.

"Well, I have a son who, although not violent, has been acting strangely of late, and I have concluded to place him in an institution of this kind."

"How old is your son?" questioned Revere.

"In his fortieth year," replied the old man.

"Oh," exclaimed the other, in surprise. "He is not a young man, then?"

"Well, yes. You would not call a man of forty old, would you?"

"How long has he been exhibiting these symptoms?" questioned Revere.

"Only about a month."

"What is his illusion? You know most all maniacs have illusions or hobbies."

"Yes, I know. Well, my son has two. One is, that he bears the same name as yourself, Jules Revere—"

"What?" gasped Revere, starting back.

"And the other," pursued the old man, in the same unperturbed tone, and here he glanced back in the direction of the old lady, "is that he has been guilty of a great crime."

Revere blanched a little, but controlled himself, and asked in a fairly calm voice:

"What is the nature of the crime?"

"Why, robbery, sir. Isn't that funny? He imagines that he has been guilty of robbing somebody of a lot of valuable diamonds."

The old woman moved uneasily in her chair.

"Yes, sir," continued the old man, "he imagines that he has stolen two sets of diamonds, and given them to— Who do you think he imagines he has given them to?" cried the old chap, laughing.

"I have no idea," replied Revere, wearily. "Whom does he imagine he has given them to?"

"Why, to a woman named—named—now what was her name? Oh, yes, I have it. Her name was Rayburn—Winnifred Rayburn!"

Revere glanced, instinctively, in the direction of the woman, and was surprised to find that she still sat there, placid and smiling as though she had no concern in the matter. The old man's remark had evidently made no impression upon her.

Revere returned his gaze to the face of the old fellow, but did not speak. His face was grave and pale, and his form shook as with an ague.

After a moment's pause, the old man resumed:

"And the funniest thing about it, is that my son imagines this woman is in this house, or at least is here sometimes, and he thinks he would like to come here to live so that he could be near her. Funny sort of a hallucination, isn't it?"

Revere made no response, but stared at the old visitor as if transfixed with a spell.

"Is there any truth in this theory of my son, or is it only a fantasy?" persisted the caller.

"Eh?" groaned Revere, as if startled from a dream.

"Is it true that this woman is in this house?" repeated the old fellow, moving his chair nearer to that of the other and staring him straight in the eyes, while his own seemed to emit flames. "At this very moment, is she not here—this Winnifred Rayburn?"

And the old man rose to his feet as he spoke.

Pointing in the direction of the woman he demanded:

"Tell me, sir, is not that she sitting over there?"

The tall man arose tremblingly to his feet and turned his ashy, scared face in the direction of the old lady. His lips moved, but appeared incapable of emitting a sound.

"Tell me, I demand, sir," almost shouted the old man; "is not that the woman of whom I speak?"

The answer was a shrill, discordant peal of laughter from the old lady.

"Tell him, you coward!" came the sharp, rasping tones of the old woman. "Why do

you not tell the old gentleman the truth? Tell him, 'yes,' this is the identical woman for whom he is inquiring!"

"I thought I was not mistaken," interposed the old visitor, calmly. "I am rarely mistaken in such matters."

He made a move as if to cross the room to where the woman sat, but, at that moment, Revere appeared to have undergone a remarkable change, for his scared face became flushed and defiant and his eyes flashed with passion and resentment.

Throwing himself in the old man's way, he cried, in a stern voice:

"No, sir, you shall not approach that woman! She is not the woman you want. She is a poor demented creature, and does not know what she is saying. She only imagines she is the woman for whom you are seeking."

"He lies!" cried the old lady, in the same cracked voice. "I am Winnifred Rayburn—the woman for whom you hold a warrant. Come and take me!"

Again the old caller essayed to cross the room, but was once more checked by Revere, who threw himself before him with redoubled determination.

A surprise ensued, for, grasping the tall man, the caller hurled him to one side as though he had been a child, and, in a moment, the accuser was at the woman's side.

Then another surprise.

Scarcely had he reached her side, when she shot up out of her chair like a flash, and, in an instant, had planted herself defiantly before him, with two revolvers leveled!

"Another step, Thad Burr, and you are a dead man!" she muttered in a low, determined voice. "You imagined that I did not know you in that disguise. Well, I did—as well as you knew me. We are quits on that, but, what are you going to do about arresting me?"

To her astonishment the great detective broke out in a good-natured laugh.

"Arrest you?" he echoed. "Who ever thought of such a thing?"

With that he turned as if to walk away.

As he anticipated, the woman lowered her weapons.

This he could see in the great mirrors that surrounded them.

Then, quicker than thought, he wheeled and covered her with his own pistols.

"Now I'll talk to you about the arrest," chuckled the expert.

CHAPTER X.

A CAPITAL CATCH.

As Detective Burr stood there, backed up against the wall of the tunnel, cool and defiant, the crowd of ruffians from the one direction and the three men from the other, pressed upon him.

He realized that he was their intended victim and that his only hope lay in intimidating them before they had time to reach him.

He possessed one decided advantage, that of standing about half-way between two of the lights which are placed some hundred feet apart along the tunnel, so that while he was in comparative gloom his adversaries were thrown out in bold relief by the lights directly behind them.

Allowing them to approach to within the compass of these lights, which brought them within fifty feet of himself, he leveled a revolver in each direction at the same time, and fired.

The effect was magical.

His aim had been unerring, as usual, and from the yell of pain that went up from each crowd, it was evident that he had done execution in both directions.

And, the best of it was, the rest of the crowd on both sides, brought to a realization of the advantage held by the detective, were stricken with panic and took to their heels!

The larger crowd retreated in the direction from which they had come, west, and the three men took up their course the way they had been going before the skirmish, so Thad continued in the same course.

The two did not slacken the pace, which was a keen run, until the tunnel was cleared, and, as they emerged, they managed to give him the slip by dodging into the shadow of the warehouses near by.

This ended the chase and Thad decided to return to his hotel, for much needed rest.

He therefore pursued his course along Madison street, and had got as far as the corner of La Salle street, when his attention was attracted by a closed carriage which stood close to the curb near an opposite corner.

The carriage was far enough from the corner to be almost concealed in shadow, and the detective probably would have passed on without noticing it, had it not been for the muffled sound of voices, mingled with which was the voice, as it seemed to him, of a child in a tone of pleading.

Thad was at the moment of the discovery concealed in deep shadow, so that there was not the least chance of being discovered.

Before leaving the hotel, that afternoon, the detective had provided himself with a disguise, and now, for the first time, he concluded to put it on.

It consisted of a gray wig and full beard of the same shade, and these he adjusted to his head and face.

Thus disguised, he retraced his steps along Madison street for some distance, until he came to the darkest place; then he crossed to the opposite side.

The shadow on this side was even denser than it had been on the other, so that he had no difficulty in creeping up to within a few yards of the corner of La Salle, where the carriage stood, without attracting the inmates' attention.

Once there, he stepped into the recess of a doorway and listened.

The sound of the child's voice had ceased, but there was still the low hum of conversation, which appeared to be that of a man and woman.

The rain had ceased by this time, but the heavens were dark and lowering with ominous clouds; the lights burned dim and feeble, and altogether it was about as dreary a night as one could imagine, even in Chicago.

A moment or two elapsed after Thad had taken up his position, when the carriage rolled away.

Then, for the first time, the detective discovered that the man—at least, one of the men—was outside of the carriage, and, when it drove away, it left him standing on the curb.

As soon as it was gone, the man stepped quickly across to the opposite side of La Salle street and disappeared so suddenly that Thad was at a loss to tell which way he had gone.

However, he had no reason to follow, and so let him go.

It was different with respect to the carriage, however.

He was curious to know something about it, for the fact of its being in that place, a business portion of the city, at that time of night, to say nothing of the child's pleading tones, which still rung in the sympathetic detective's ears, had aroused his suspicion that all was not right.

The few seconds consumed by his meditation, however, had sufficed for the carriage to get out of sight, rendering it impossible for him to follow it.

Still Thad did not despair.

Something seemed to tell him that the occupants of the carriage were in some way connected with the crowd of criminals he was pursuing, and that they would go either to the flat in Madison street, or to the house of Jules Revere in Forest avenue.

He walked along La Salle for some distance, and finally came upon a cab-stand. There he promptly secured a vehicle, climbed in and ordered the driver to take him to the house in Forest avenue, at his swiftest speed.

"I shall go there first," he mused, "and in the event of my not finding the parties, I can return to the flat afterward."

So precipitate was the speed, as bargained, that scarcely fifteen minutes had elapsed when the cabman pulled up in front of Jules Revere's house.

Thad hastily alighted and, ordering the cabman to drive a half block or so away and await him, concealed himself in the shadow at one side of the stoop.

"If I am not mistaken," mused the detective, "I have beaten them by that furious drive. If so, the game is mine."

He had not been there long before the

sound of approaching carriage wheels fell upon his ear, and a few moments later a carriage drove up and stopped in front of the door.

But one person alighted, to Thad's surprise, and that was a woman.

To his further surprise, or double surprise, rather, when the woman passed under the lights he saw that she was a very old person, and, instead of applying for admission at the front door, she passed around the corner of the house as if intending to enter from a rear door.

At the corner of the house she was met by another woman, who appeared to be a servant, and the few words which the detective was enabled to catch convinced him of the assumed old woman's identity.

Thad then stepped into the vestibule, and for a long time stood there deliberating what was the next best move to make.

At length he rung the bell and was admitted, and we have already seen how well he succeeded.

When brought under the muzzles of the New York expert's revolvers, the woman did not wince or show the least indication of nervousness; on the contrary she looked Thad coolly in the face, and smiled as she did so.

"Well," she said, cheerfully, "you got the drop on me that time, didn't you?"

And she threw down her pistols with a careless shrug.

"Yes," was replied, "I usually get the drop on people of your kind sooner or later."

"It is an easy enough matter," she responded, wearily. "The thing is to keep it when you get it."

"Oh, I generally manage to do that," responded Thad, confidently.

"With people in general, no doubt. But you have never had to deal with Winnifred Rayburn before."

"I have now, though, and I shall see that she is properly dealt with."

With that he stepped up and grasped her slender wrists.

"Oh, are you going to put the irons on me?" she asked in an unconcerned voice.

"That is what I am going to do, madam," replied the detective, suiting the action to the word.

"Oh, how cruel you are!" she complained. "Just see how slender my wrists are to be confined by those vulgar irons!"

"They are very slender," admitted Thad, still smiling, "and I have no doubt that some of those diamonds would become them better. But come, we are wasting time."

Saying which, he took the woman's arm and started toward the door.

During all this time Thad had forgotten the very existence of Revere, and was therefore more than surprised to see him sitting there with a face ashen with terror, and evidently powerless to either speak or move.

As Winnifred passed him she paused long enough to cast a scornful glance down upon him and hiss:

"There is the greatest coward the world has ever seen. He had not courage enough to either betray or defend me, and yet I have done him enough injury to justify him in murdering me, and enough good to induce him to lay down his life for me. He would do neither. Bah! a fig for such a man!"

And she swept on in disgust.

When the detective got his prisoner outside the house, he said:

"We will walk down this way a short distance; I have a cab in waiting."

"Ah, then you were sure of your game?"

"Fairly so," he replied.

"If I had been as sure of it," she mused, "I might have kept my carriage waiting. However, there was other work for that."

"That reminds me," interjected Burr. "When I saw you down La Salle street awhile ago there was a child. What has become of that?"

The woman laughed.

"Oh, wouldn't you like to know?" she retorted, tauntingly. "However, that is what the carriage was used for after I left it."

"Whose child is it? and what are you doing with it?" questioned the expert.

"It is my child, of course. What do you think?"

"I think that you are not telling me the

truth, and that the child belongs to some one else."

"Oh, well, you are keen," she laughed. "You are in the habit of unearthing mysteries, so use your skill toward clearing up this one."

"So I shall—and succeed, too. But here is our cab. Let me help you to mount."

With that the powerful detective fairly lifted the frail woman from the ground and placed her in the cab.

"To the city prison!" were Thad's orders, and the astonished cabman put whip and dashed away, with nearly as great speed as he had come.

CHAPTER XI.

DOCKY PETE.

THERE is a street or lane leading off of North Clark street—a mere crevice or crack in the solid front of masonry which faces the great thoroughfare—which bears the suggestive title of the "Coop."

Whether the name had its origin in the fact that the lane's or alley's principal residents are negroes, with the race's weakness for fowls, I shall not pretend to say, but the fact remains that the lane is called the Coop and is inhabited mainly by the colored race.

Few whites are to be found tucked away in its unsavory attics and cellars, and that they are of the worse types of humanity may be assumed.

The Coop is littered with cast-off clothing, broken crockery, dead cats and every variety of garbage it is possible to imagine, and flanked on either side by tumble-down rookeries, all small, filthy and dilapidated and literally unfit for human tenancy.

About the middle of this delectable vicinage is a groggery kept by a villainous-looking specimen of humanity, known to the police as "Docky Pete."

By virtue of his proprietorship of the groggery, called the "Growler," and the fact that he has spent something like thirty of his fifty years of life in the various penitentiaries of the country, Docky Pete is looked upon as a great man among his villainous associates.

His saloon is not only the headquarters of the most vicious characters, but is a "fence" for the reception of such plunder as these vicious denizens secure in their daily and nightly operations.

About two o'clock on the morning on which Detective Burr had the scrimmage in the bar of the United States Hotel, and his adventure in the Madison street tunnel, the Growler was filled with a choice collection of "hard cases," but a number of whom were suffering from wounds of a more or less serious nature. Docky himself carried one arm in a sling, and had his "mug" so swathed in bandages that he resembled an Egyptian mummy.

He sat in the back room of his hostelry with a half-emptied glass of whisky in front of him, in a decidedly sullen mood, while in various directions about the room sat his battered and dejected comrades.

They were a sorry looking set.

Some carried an arm in a sling, like their leader; some had their heads swathed in bandages; others were rendered more hideous than nature had intended by criss-cross patches of plaster nearly covering their faces; some were wanting an eye, and some even mourned the loss of that useful and ornamental organ, the nose!

On the opposite side of the table from Docky sat his bosom friend and lieutenant, Bloody Duggan.

He, too, had suffered in the scrimmage, and sat glum and silent, nursing a hand from which two fingers had been clipped by a pistol ball, while a long strip of plaster, extending from his left eye to his chin, showed that the ruffian had received other injuries.

Docky shifted uneasily in his chair for some time, while he fingered the whisky glass in front of him, or drew circles with its wet bottom on the table, as he spoke:

"Dat was a fine racket, Blud, an' dat's right," he began, and such of his face was on exhibition went through a contortion evidently intended for an expression of disdain. "Jes' to t'ink uv de whole mob on us gal-

lutes bein' done up by a single foxy smeller! We ough'er all jump in Lake Michigan. Dat's right!"

His pal shrugged his shoulders and grunted, but offered no comment on this outburst.

"If dey'd 'a' b'in two on 'em," pursued the injured brute, "it wouldn't 'a' bin quite so bad; but one—kah!"

His vocabulary failed; his feeling of disgust was inexpressible.

"But, say," grunted his friend, "de beak got de dead draw on us afore we knowed w'ot was up, an' den whoever seen a cove dat could handle a pop like dat? W'y say, he never wasted a' ounce o' lead on dead walls, he didn't; it all went where dere was hurtin'. See?"

"Dat's right, Blud," coincided Docky, "an' de purtiest part of it was, every pill salivated two or t'ree o' de blokes. Say, dat's purty work, dat is, w'en a cove uses one pill ter perforate a whole line o' men," he pursued, growing enthusiastic over Thad's execution, even though it had been at his own and his comrade's expense. "I've offen t'ought I'd like to do it meself—jes' line up a lot o' galloots an' bore 'em all wid one shot, but I ain't never struck de chance; but dat duck done it, beautiful. Dat's right."

"Who is de rooster, Dock?" queried his companion.

"Oh, he's a cove dey brought from Noo York, an' dey say he's dead slick," growled Docky—a New York special w'ot gives de Chicago blokes big odds an' beats 'em every time."

"W'ot's his lay-out hair?"

"He's smellin' de trunk case, I reckon. Leastwise dat's w'ot I t'ink by His Nibs puttin' us onter 'im las' night."

"Say," growled the other, shifting his position painfully, indicating that he had received another wound in the vicinity of the hips, "w'ot do we git fer de scrimmage?"

"Not a plunk," grumbled Ducky.

"W'ot?"

"Dat's right."

"Yer don't mean ter say dat we ain't er goin' ter get nuthin' after all dat chawin' up?"

"Dat's right," reiterated Docky.

"How's dat?" grumbled Duggan.

"We didn't deliver de goods, see?"

"Was dat de 'greement?"

"Dat's right. His Joblots tole me if we done de bloke, five hun'ed plunks was de racket. We didn't do 'im, see?"

"T'under an' Mars! dat's no way, Docky," sulked his pal. "W'y didn't yer say a hun'ed plunks fer doin' de bes' we could?"

"Cause I don't do t'ings dat way. 'Sides, His Whiskers don't do t'ings dat way, neider. His game's to have de goods delivered, or no dust, see? and dat's right."

"How 'bout de udder—de kid? We git de sugar fer dat, eh?"

"Dat's right."

"And de spyin' business fer de dame?"

"Dat's all right, too."

"Good!" cried Duggan, in a more cheerful tone. "'Tain't quite so bad, after all."

"Nope, unless we git pinched fer de job," insinuated Docky.

"W'ot?" cried the other, evidently frightened at the intimation.

"Dat New York special, as I tell yer," explained the leader, "is dead slick, an' 'tain't likely he's a-goin' ter let up on us easy."

"W'ot's de lay den? Vamoose?"

"Nixy."

"W'y not?"

"I've give me word dat I'll see His Whiskers t'rough, an' yer know w'ot dat means." Duggan groaned.

"It means dat ye'll do it, if yer hafter put de lot ov us under de gravel, groaned Duggan.

"Dat's right," assented Docky, coolly.

"W'ot's it goin' ter pan out?"

"A little matter o' ten t'ousand."

This revelation appeared to instill new life into the lieutenant, for he slapped his leg and grinned as far as his bandages would permit.

"Yer don't say so, Dock, old hoss?" he ejaculated.

"Dat's right," was the calm rejoinder.

"Ten t'ousand plunks?" screeched the other, vociferously.

"Dat's right."

"Say, Dock, youse is a brick! Put 'er dere. An' here's stickin' ter yer till ye rot."

"Dat's right," echoed Docky, grasping the proffered hand. "W'ot's yer poison?"

"Same."

"Here, Jimmy!" called the leader, to his bartender, "bring us s'more tangleleg."

At this suggestion the rest of the gang gathered about the table, grinned, smacked their lips, "spat cotton" and exhibited other indications of their desire to be "counted in."

Docky glowered about the motley circle, and finally growled:

"Jimmy, fetch glasses fer de rest o' de gents. But," he supplemented, turning to the crowd, "I hadn't oughter do it. Youse don't deserve it, an' de nex' time yer let a single measly beak do yer, ye'r not in it wid de boss no longer."

There instantly arose an unintelligible chorus of voices, which, if taken separately, would doubtless have proven to be some sort of an apology and pledge of future faithfulness, but as no one voice could be distinguished from another, the boss brought his glass down on the table with a sounding thud and silence was instantly restored. Then he spoke:

"Tain't no use tryin' to 'splain away dat business, gents. It was dead rocky, an' dat's an end on't. But yer done de bes' yer could under der circumstances. Now listen."

Dead silence reigned.

"To-morrer night all youse dat's on foot mus' be on hand fer anudder deal."

"W'ot's de lay, boss?" from several voices.

"Dat'll be 'splaind to yer in time," replied Docky authoritatively. "W'ot I want youse ter do is ter mosey off to yer hutches an' git all de sleep yer kin, an' be on hand to-morrer night. See?"

Every man was eager to seal his vow of compliance with a draught of the "tangleleg," so raising glasses in the air all sung out in turn:

"Here's to de boss!"

"Long life to de boss!"

"Death to de beak!"

"Here's to de Twisters," [the name assumed by the gang.]

And many similar toasts.

When they had all swallowed their "p'izen," Docky said:

"Now, gents, mind w'ot I told yer, an' if I ketch any of yer flukin' or gettin' booze 'tween now an' to-morrer night yer name's mud. Git!"

And the motley crowd dispersed.

CHAPTER XII.

A RAZZLE-DAZZLED SERGEANT.

THAD was now a little elate at the ease of the capture of Winnifred Rayburn, after the repeated failure of the best detective talent in Chicago.

The woman offered no resistance, but went along cheerfully, and, what was a greater surprise to her captor, no attempt was made on the part of her friends to rescue her, as he had more than half expected would be done.

When they reached the prison, Thad was still further astonished to find that the prisoner had undergone a complete metamorphosis, for, instead of the old lady with whom he had started, he found a woman of not more than thirty-five, with jet-black hair, only slightly sprinkled with gray.

In other words, it was Winnifred Rayburn in her true character.

She had removed her disguise in the darkness of the cab during their ride to the prison.

The detective was just marveling—not without a certain amount of admiration—at the cunning of this action (for, had she been found in disguise, it would have gone a long way toward convicting her,) when in rushed Jules Revere, excited and out of breath.

Rushing up to the sergeant's desk, without apparently noticing the presence of either Burr or the woman, he cried, as soon as he could get his breath:

"Sergeant, there has been a great mistake—a horrible blunder—committed by a detective. I hope I am not too late to have it rectified."

Everybody, including the sergeant, looked at the man in astonishment and curious expectancy.

"What is the blunder, sir?" questioned the official.

"Why, sir," explained the tall man, turning for the first time toward Thad and the woman, "this lady, who is my wife, has been arrested, through the blunder of this detective, in place of her sister, who is the real culprit."

The sergeant looked at him incredulously, and asked:

"How did it happen, sir?"

"Through a mistake on the part of the detective, I tell you," reiterated the tall man excitedly. "You see, my wife here and her sister are twins and bear a very strong resemblance to each other, and through this coincidence the detective has been led to commit the error."

The sergeant turned to the woman and asked:

"Madam, is this your husband?"

"It is," replied Winnifred as coolly as if she had been telling the candid truth.

He then turned to the detective.

Thad was a trifle confused over this unexpected turn of affairs, but with a slight effort maintained his self-possession.

"Mr. Detective," demanded the sergeant, "what have you to say to this?"

"Simply that it is a conspiracy, sergeant," was the cool response. "This woman is no more his wife than she is mine. I am positive she is the person for whom this warrant calls."

"You had ample reason for believing her the person wanted before serving the warrant, had you?"

"I had. And, when identified, she not only confessed that she was the person, but said she was ready to go with me."

Turning to Revere, the sergeant said:

"You will have to prove what you claim is true, and as that can only be done at the examination, I do not see that I can do anything but lock the prisoner up."

"But, my dear sir," persisted Revere, "I can prove to you in one minute what I say is true. Will you have the goodness to look at this?"

The official glanced it over, and knit his brows.

"This is very strange," he commented.

"How is this, Mr. Burr?"

"Simply this, sergeant," responded Thad: "this woman, in making her preparations for this robbery, had that notice inserted for the purpose of throwing the police off her track. Now, sir, if you will refer to the records you will find that this person, according to them, was arrested over a week ago for this same offense. She was admitted to bail, and immediately sailed for England. The woman arrested on that occasion was this man's wife, and this woman's sister."

The official had turned to the entry by this time.

"Yes," he murmured, "I see by this that Winnifred Rayburn was arrested on a charge of robbery on the fifteenth. Is this the same case, Mr. Burr?"

"It is," replied Thad.

"Then, sir," said the sergeant solemnly, "unless you can prove that this is not the same woman who was arrested before, I do not see how I can hold her. You cannot arrest a person who is out on bail for the same offense."

"This is the same woman," interposed Revere, promptly. "Soon after the robbery was committed, detectives came to my house and arrested my wife here, in mistake for her sister, who had gone to England."

Thad chuckled to himself.

This was the very admission he wanted the fellow to make.

"Now, sergeant," he began, hardly able to conceal his enthusiasm, "please note this statement: He admits that his wife was arrested on the fifteenth of November. Now look again at the date of the shipping list. See if it is not the eighth?"

The official looked, and opened his eyes very wide.

"Now, sir," pursued Thad, triumphantly, "if Winnifred Rayburn sailed for England on the eighth, how could she have committed the diamond robbery in Chicago on the eleventh, the date on which this record

shows she was arrested, and yet this man claims his wife was arrested by mistake for her sister?"

The sergeant was astonished, Revere was in despair, and the woman alone did not appear in the least affected.

She smiled as calmly and innocently as a saint in a church window.

"I guess you are right, Mr. Burr," faltered the sergeant, who was by this time so completely muddled that he scarcely knew what he was doing, "but—but—I do not see how I can hold a person who is out on trial for the same offense."

"I shall assume all the responsibility," interposed Thad, "and I shall prove within twenty-four hours that this woman is not this man's wife, that she is the noted and much wanted Winnifred Rayburn, the diamond thief, and that the woman who was arrested before and is now out on bail, is the real wife of this man, Jules Revere. This man's name, as he will admit, is Jules Revere. Now refer to that shipping list once more, sergeant, and see if you do not find the name of Jules Revere among the list of passengers who were supposed to have sailed on the City of Paris on the eighth."

The sergeant examined the list again, and presently looked up, flushed and agitated more than ever.

"Yes, it is here," he admitted. "What is your name, sir?" he questioned, addressing the tall man.

"Francis Percival," coolly replied Revere.

"Your name is not Jules Revere, then?"

"Certainly not."

The sergeant looked at Thad helplessly.

"What have you to say to that, Mr. Burr?"

"What can I say?" returned Thad, hopelessly, "except that it is a lie—an infamous lie. The fellow's name is Jules Revere, and he lives on Forest avenue," naming the number.

"Is that the location of your residence, sir?" questioned the sergeant.

"It is not," calmly rejoined the other.

"My residence is on Madison street."

Thad was nonplused.

He was about to suggest looking at the Directory to ascertain whether the man was telling the truth or not; but he remembered having consulted the Directory for the name of Francis Percival, yet did not find it; and now, if the name should prove to be there, it would strengthen the fellow's story.

After a few moments' reflection, the sergeant said:

"I'm very sorry, Mr. Burr; but I do not see how, under the circumstances, I can hold this woman. If you had any proof that your story, and not these people's, was true, I should be glad to hold her."

"You do not value integrity as anything, then, I take it, or discredit the want of it?"

"I don't understand you," retorted the sergeant.

"I will explain. You know me by reputation, and know that my veracity has never been questioned. On the other hand, you only know this man from what you have seen of him here. Now, I want to ask you whether you consider his statements such as to inspire your confidence in his truthfulness?"

"I don't know," faltered the official.

"I—"

"Do you not remember his stating that Winnifred Rayburn had sailed for England on the 8th of November, and the next breath stated that she had committed the robbery on the 15th?"

"That is true; he did say that," rejoined the officer, growing confused again. "I guess, under the circumstances—if you will bear the responsibility, Mr. Burr—I shall do as you request and lock the woman up."

Revere was at the end of his resources now and glanced appealingly at Winnifred for a suggestion of a way out of the dilemma.

He, as well as the detective, wondered that she made no attempt to help him out.

Where was her boasted subtlety?

But they were not to be kept long in suspense.

After a little hesitation she drew a large pocketbook from her bosom, and began:

"Well, as neither my husband nor the detective appear able to settle this question satisfactorily, be good enough to examine this."

And she drew a paper from the pocket-book and handed it up to the sergeant.

It was a marriage-certificate, showing that on a certain date Francis Percival and Florence Guthrie had been united in the holy bands of wedlock.

"If that is not sufficient," interjected the woman modestly, "I shall be pleased to have you send for the landlord and several of the tenants whose names I shall give you of the flats where I live—I will pay all the expense—and if they do not identify me as the person I represent myself, I shall cheerfully go to prison."

This was a clincher.

Thad saw at once that the artful creature had outwitted him, and he gave up in despair.

"Under the circumstances," said the bewildered sergeant, "it will be impossible—that is, I do not see how I can hold this woman on your warrant, Mr. Burr. You may go, madam."

"Thank you, sir!" with the sweetest of smiles.

Revere and Winnifred hurried out of the court-room, and Thad remarked:

"Well, I thought I had encountered slick criminals, sergeant, but that one beats them all."

"You still stick to it that she is the woman you want, do you?" retorted the officer, with a good deal of aspersions.

"Why, certainly!" returned Thad stoutly. "She confessed to her identity to me. You made a great mistake in not holding her. I don't know what the chief will say."

"But, how was I to get around that marriage-certificate?" muttered the sergeant in a frightened voice.

"When you have had as much experience with criminals as I have, sergeant, you will learn that it is no more trouble for these people to have a marriage-certificate than a morning paper. It is a part of their working paraphernalia."

CHAPTER XIII.

A NOVEMBER NIGHT'S STRANGE ADVENTURE.

As the bells throughout the city were clanging out in lusty chorus the hour of eleven, the following night, a number of skulking forms slouched out of the door of the "Growler" in the Coop, stole along the dingy lane to where it opens into North Clark street, and thence along that thoroughfare toward the north.

It was the gang known as the "Twisters," commanded by Docky Pete—or rather was a remnant of them.

Contrary to the leader's hopes, a good many of the gang were not in condition, owing to their rough treatment at Thad's hands, the previous night, to join the expedition.

Therefore, but about a dozen left the "Growler" on the present occasion, and some of them were still disfigured with bandages and strips of surgeon's plaster.

When they had walked a couple of blocks they paused on the street corner as if to wait for something; but did not wait long for soon a vehicle drove up to the corner and stopped.

It was a strange-looking affair—a cross between a carriage and a stage-coach, and was large enough to easily carry twenty passengers on the inside, besides half a dozen on the roof.

As soon as this vehicle stopped the dozen or so of toughs climbed in, and it was driven away toward the north end of the city.

Docky had not mentioned to his men what the nature of the expedition was to be; but, as soon as the coach was under way he began:

"Now, gents, I reckon yer'd like ter know w'ot's de lay to night, wouldn't yer?"

"Dat's w'ot!" answered Bloody Duggan.

"Wal, it's dis," announced the boss; "His Whiskers has got de gold bars buried out here, and he wants ter move 'em, now dat de 'citement over de trunk business is sorter quieted down, and he's afeared the peelers 'll be on his scent. So he wants us galoots to take keer o' him."

"An' we'll do it, boss, if it takes a laig," vowed Duggan. "Dat's right."

"Dat's right," echoed the rest of the gang.

On rolled the coach, past Lincoln Park,

past Lakeview Cemetery, and finally reached a lonely piece of road, beyond the city limits, flanked on either side by a swamp covered with water oaks and thick, tangled underbrush.

Here the driver, who had evidently had his instructions, slackened his pace to a walk, and the coach glided along through the darkness like a great phantom, with a soft muffled rumble that could scarcely be heard a dozen yards away.

After going for some distance along the swamp road, at a signal from Docky, the driver pulled up.

Docky put his head out of the window and listened intently for a long time; then, at length, drawing in his head, he whispered:

"Don't seem to be no one movin' yit. I reckon we're too early for 'em," and, after a momentary silence, he added:

"I wonder if we've struck de right place, or if we oughter went a leetle fuder 'long?"

Evidently concluding that the latter was the case, he put his head out again and said in a low voice to the driver:

"Give 'er anudder turn or two, Mike."

The coach moved again, at the same snail pace, but before it had proceeded a hundred yards the boss called out again to the driver to stop.

It was at a point where the road made a considerable bend, rendering the spot a trifle lonelier and more dreary than where they had halted before.

Again Docky put his head out to listen, but in a moment pulled it in with the announcement:

"Here dey come."

A one-horse buggy came driving slowly along, and, although not so much as an outline of the vehicle or its passengers was discernible in the dense gloom, the subdued sound of voices indicated that two men were in it.

Presently it could be heard that one of them had alighted and was pushing his way into the thicket at the side of the road.

After a time a pale light flashed up in the depths of the thicket, a hundred feet from the road.

It only gleamed for a moment, and then went out. Soon the man was heard at the side of the buggy again.

"It's all right, Ned. Get down and hitch the horse and come help me with it," he commanded.

Then Ned alighted, and said:

"It will not be necessary to hitch him. He will stand."

The two then made their way into the thicket, and in a few minutes the same pale light was visible once more.

Then followed the almost inaudible sound of digging.

All of this had been watched and taken note of by the gang, with the utmost interest.

At length the boss glanced round upon his pals and whispered:

"It don't hardly look de right t'ing to let dem fellers do all dat work alone."

"Dat's right, boss," chimed Duggan.

"We orter give 'em a lift."

"Still it wouldn't hardly be de square t'ing widout givin' me word."

"Wot's dat, boss," objected Duggan, "w'en ye t'ink o' de bullion? We should be dar!"

"We'll git ten t'ousand," growled the boss; "w'ot more d'ye want, de earth?"

"Dat's all right 'bout de ten t'ousand," muttered Duggan, "but w'ot's a measley ten t'ousand to all de stuff dese chaps has tucked away in dat box?"

"Sides," coincided Black Mike, "the murtherin' divvils nivver kim boy it, honest."

"Roight yez air, Moike," put in Dublin Ted, a gentleman of the same extraction and noted for having the worst record of any man in the gang, "thim judes has no roight to the metal, the dirty thaves! Oi'm for takin' it away from thim entoirly, so Oi am!"

The contagion thus being started it spread among the ruffians like wild fire.

So much so, that in a minute or two every man of them was clamoring for the treasure, and threatening to revolt and go of his own accord, if the boss refused his consent.

Docky offered some protest, but saw that it was useless to resist, so said:

"Say, gents, it's dead low—and dat's right—it's dead low to play it on His Whiskers like dat, but, as you gents says, de dudes has too much o' de yellow stuff for deir health, dey're liable to git inter trouble, so I guess we'd best relieve 'em of it."

At the words every man in the gang sprung from the coach.

"Hold a bit, gents!" admonished the boss, as the men were about to plunge into the thicket, pell-mell. "Let's do dis t'ing proud w'ile we're about it. Now scatter in different directions and circle round where ye see de lights, and w'en I give de signal close in on 'em."

This was sufficient; the gang scattered and proceeded to work their way through the tangled undergrowth.

In ten minutes all were spread around in a circle, completely surrounding the treasure-lifters.

The latter had removed the earth from the treasure-box or chest, and were in the act of raising it out of the pit.

One of the two was a small man, with a pointed beard and black, restless eyes, while the other was a burly fellow—a perfect giant in stature, with such development of muscle as to deter any ordinary man from attacking him.

Add to this a square jaw, a low forehead, and a pair of small, sinister eyes, and you have a fair picture of Ned Grogan, prize-fighter, burglar and all-round crook.

The other man is too well known to the reader to require introduction. We have had transitory glimpses of Francis Percival on several previous occasions.

As has been said, they had removed the dirt from the chest and were about to lift it out of the pit; but when they grasped the edges of the box and attempted to raise it, they found that it was not the trifling task they had imagined it would be.

Indeed, with all his gigantic strength, with the addition of what the smaller man had to offer, the heavy chest would not budge.

"What in thunder is the matter with it?" grunted Percival. "Two of you put it here. Why cannot we two lift it out?"

"The two consisted of meself an' Patsy Slavin," interposed Ned, straightening his back, "and Patsy's akel to tin av you, sor, askin' yer pairdon."

"You are right about that, Ned," confessed the little man. "Well, the only thing to be done is to go for more help. Docky's men are there in the coach. Go and ask a couple of them to come here and give us a lift."

"Betther have foor av thim, sor," suggested Ned.

"Very well, fetch four of them."

Ned started for the road, parting the thick bushes as he went; but had not proceeded far when Percival heard a series of whacks, followed by a sound, which indicated that a tussle was going on somewhere in the direction of the road.

At that moment a peculiar whistle rung out upon the stillness, and in another instant the "Twisters" were closing in upon the solitary man at the pit.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE BLOW IN THE DARK.

PERCIVAL was somewhat surprised when, instead of the four men expected, nearly a dozen of the motley crew were revealed by the pale light of his little lantern, and when his eyes fell upon the face of Pete, with its patches and ominous scowl, the fellow's heart sunk.

"I understan' yer want help ter move de box, cap'n," muttered Docky.

"Yes, it is rather heavy for us two," faltered the little man. "It's heavier than I thought it was."

"Wal, I reckon we kin han'le it," chuckled the Twister chief. "Gents, take holt!"

Then turning to Percival again, he asked: "Whur's t'other chap? I thought yer fetched big Ned along wid yer fer to—"

Docky's speech was interrupted by a yell as of some one being murdered, in the direction of the road.

Both men held their breath, while Docky turned a little pale.

"W'at in t'under's dat?" he growled.

"It was a mistake for you to fetch all the men away," muttered Percival. "The chances are we are done for. The police are on us, I fear."

Docky felt awkward. Not daring to divulge the plot he had undertaken, he yet knew that if the police were upon them, he would need the counsel of the cooler head and deeper judgment of the little man.

Then came the sound of blows accompanied by a repetition of the horrible yell, followed by the sound of tussling. This suddenly ceased, and next footsteps were heard coming toward them.

Docky and the other instinctively drew their revolvers, at which all of Docky's men, who stood about, did the same.

But, their precaution was unnecessary, for the next instant Bloody Duggan dashed into their presence.

The pseudonym never suited him better than at that moment, for he was covered with blood, and his clothes were in ribbons.

"W'at in t'under's de racket, Blud?" gasped Docky.

"It's de big bloke," panted Duggan. "I seen 'im makin' a break fer de road, an' tried to stop 'im. But, say, yer might as well try ter stop a cyclone as dat rooster."

"W'ere is 'e now?" demanded the chief.

"He's out dere, an's liable to come back any minute."

"Oh, yer didn't do 'im, den?" growled the boss.

"Do 'im? Say, it'll take de gang ter do dat feller, boss! He's a holy terror, he is."

Docky looked a trifle discouraged, but proceeded to business.

"Six o' yer lift dat box an' lug it out to de road," he at once ordered.

Six of the gang grasped the treasure chest and attempted to lift it, but it was found necessary for two more to put their hands to it before they could raise it.

"This is strange!" muttered Percival, "Grogan and another man carried it out here alone. I cannot see why it should take so many now."

"Hully cheel!" retorted Docky. "I dunno who de udder bloke was, but dat Grogan kin carry as much as an elephant hisself. He's not a man. He's a Goliath, sure!"

But, stepping up to one of the men moving away with the box the boss whispered something in his ear, to which the man nodded.

Percival was too keen a man not to have his suspicions now fully aroused, but he kept his own counsel, and strode away from the gang, and, in the darkness, made his way to the road.

There he found big Ned standing at the head of the horse hitched to the buggy.

None of the gang had yet reached the road.

"Why didn't you come back, Ned?" asked Percival, in a low tone.

"Howly saints!" was ejaculated; "have yez no oyes at all? Don't yez see that the murtherin' gang's bethrayin' us?"

"I suspected as much," gasped the other; "but, how did you discover it?"

"Faix, as soon as Oi saw the whole bloody divils circling around yez out there in the bush Oi knowed phwat was to pay, and that is why Oi didn't come back. Oi knowed Oi could do better execution out here."

"What is your plan, Ned?"

"Whoy, we— But, here they come!" he broke off suddenly. "Watch me motions, sor."

Half a dozen of the gang had burst through the thicket, out into the road, and following them came the eight men carrying the box.

Percival stepped into the shadow of the buggy, while Ned remained at the horse's head.

Docky Pete, following the box-carriers, tried to penetrate the deep darkness, but failing, he asked in little more than a whisper:

"W'ere's dem blokes?"

"I dunno, boss," replied Duggan, "cept dey're skipped."

"Don't yer reckon on nothin' o' dat kind, Blud," warned the boss. "Dey ain't de skippin' kind. Keep yer peepers skinned, or dey'll do us yit."

"W'at's de lay, boss?" asked Duggan.

"Put de box inter de buggy, an' den two of yer mount an' drive like blue rockets w'ile de res' on us'll take de coach. But be on

yer guard an' ready ter fight, fer dem blokes is layin' fer us, I knows dat."

This, whispered to his lieutenant, was duly ordered by Duggan. The weighty box was lifted into the compartment back of the seat. Then Docky ordered his lieutenant to mount the seat, and do the driving, which he proceeded to do, but as his head was lifted a little above the top of the seat he received a blow between the eyes that sent him back into the road, in a lump.

Springing from the darkness on opposite side of the buggy, some one was there to receive the ruffian, and the terrible blow followed.

Docky, realizing what had happened, knew the jig was up unless some heavy work was immediately done; so he called out:

"Every galoot to de buggy, and roast de son of a gun w'ot's in possessh!"

And drawing his revolver, he fired two or three shots in rapid succession at the point where he supposed the man now in the buggy would be.

But, to no purpose; for the man on the seat struck the horse sharply the instant Duggan's body touched the ground, and away the alarmed animal dashed at a break-neck gait, toward the city!

There was a general surprise party there in the road, among Pete and his gang, but this surprise gave way to astonishment when it was discovered that both Percival and big Ned were still there in the road! Some unknown party had driven off in the buggy with the treasure!

Then it was evident to all, that the person who had landed the sledge-hammer blow between Duggan's eyes, was the dare-devil of that remarkable performance.

Who was he?

Not a soul of them could guess!

Mutual misery often works fast friends; so the two factions, patching up a truce, entered the coach and drove back to town, a disgusted lot.

"Dis is worse dan las' night," growled Docky. "Anudder sich a piece o' work, an' de Twisters goes out o' business. See?"

CHAPTER XV.

HOW THE NEW YORKER STRUCK THE RIGHT TRAIL.

It was after daylight when Burr left the Central Station, or city prison, greatly displeased with the result of his night's work, and yet he could not help admiring the genius of the siren who had defeated him through sheer cunning.

He returned to his hotel and after partaking of a hearty breakfast, went to his room and took a much-needed sleep.

He arose about noon, and called upon the chief of police.

"Well, what progress, old man?" was asked.

"Not much," returned Thad discontentedly. "I have a tough gang to deal with, and, while I have every confidence in ultimate success, things have not yet gone as well as I could wish."

"Well, I have a bit of information for you that may be of use," informed the chief, by way of rallying the detective's flagging spirits.

"What is that?" queried Thad eagerly.

"Friends of the dead man have arrived from California. They verify, in nearly every detail, your theory about the man. They also make the astonishing statement that he was supposed to have had nearly a million dollars' worth of gold in bars with him! This proves another portion of your theory to the effect that the man was murdered for his money."

"That is gratifying at least," interjected Thad, "but it would be more gratifying if I could find some trace of this fellow Percival. The woman I arrested last night, and whom one of your sergeants refused to hold simply because she succeeded in proving to his satisfaction that she was the wife of the man who came to the station, is, in my opinion, Percival's wife. She undoubtedly is involved in the crime, as we already know her to be a very vixen of wickedness and deception."

"If she is Percival's wife, how did she contrive to make the sergeant believe she was the other man's wife?" asked the chief.

"There was where her cunning came in. First of all, the man gave his name as Francis Percival, whereas I knew him to be Jules Revere. He asserted that the prisoner was his wife, that I had arrested her through mistake for her sister; and then, to cap the climax, she drew out a marriage-certificate which showed that she had been married on a certain date to Francis Percival!"

"Which was enough for the sergeant, I suppose," laughed the chief. "Well, the best of us may be downed by a subtle and unprincipled woman sometimes; but you will get the better of her yet; I am sure of that."

"I trust I shall," sighed the detective. "But, speaking of the gold bullion: If this man had any such amount as that, it is strange where the rogue and murderer could have disposed of it."

"He could not have managed it alone, that is evident."

"Oh, I am sure of that, from what I have already discovered."

"You think he has confederates, then?"

"I not only think it, I know it."

"Any great number?"

"I should say, judging from what I have discovered, that there is a gang of them," replied Thad.

"And thoroughly organized, probably?"

"No, I cannot say much for their organization," laughed the detective. "In fact, from the ease with which I, single-handed, was able to put them to flight, I should say their organization was rather defective."

"Oh, it was you who routed the gang on the West-side last night, was it?" ejaculated the chief, in surprise.

"Yes, I must own the corn," laughed Thad.

And then related the incidents connected with that thrilling episode.

"You are a remarkable man, Mr. Burr," declared the chief, at the conclusion of the narrative, "and there can be no question about your success in the end. By the way, the friends of the murdered man—that is to say, his son and his daughter—will call upon you some time to-day or to-morrow, as they wish to have a talk with you regarding the case."

"I shall be glad to see them," assured the New Yorker.

Sure enough, during the afternoon Thad received a call from the two Californians, and what he learned from them gave him not only new material upon which to work, but also inspired renewed courage to push on with the case.

As soon as they left him—it was nearly six o'clock—Thad took a cab and drove out to the apartment-house in Madison street which had been occupied by the Percivals.

After repeated rings at the bell, to which there was no response, he finally concluded that no one was at home, and was about to turn away, when the janitor happened to pass out.

Burr inquired of him whether he had seen anything of the Percivals or not, to which the janitor responded that the people in question had given up the flat that very day.

"You see," explained the janitor, "they only rented the flat, furnished, from another family who had been away, and as the other family returned to-day, the Percivals had to go."

"You have no idea where they went, have you?"

"No, sir; they didn't give me their address."

"Another set-back," mused Thad, as he turned away. "If it had not been for the stupidity of that ass of a sergeant, I might have had the woman secure, at least, and the man would have followed in due time; but, now, they will probably get out of the country before I strike their trail again."

He retraced his steps toward the East-side again, and made his way by street car to the United States Hotel.

It had grown dusk by this time, and, before entering the place, Thad stepped into a convenient doorway and affixed a full beard to his face, completely changing his appearance; this done, he walked into the bar-room.

Pretty much the same crowd was there as on the previous occasion, but nobody paid any attention to him; and, taking a mild

drink at the bar, he sauntered about the room, noting the personality of its patrons and listening to the conversation.

For a long time he saw or heard nothing that interested him, and, to kill time, sat down at a table and ordered a glass of beer.

The beer had just been served when two men entered and took seats at another table near by, and at once began to talk.

Thad noticed that one was of enormous size, with muscles like a prize-fighter.

"So ye're not takin' nothin' to-night, Ned?" asked the big fellow's companion, a medium-sized man. "How is that? On the temperance lay?"

"Not exactly that, Larry," rejoined the big man. "But, the truth is, Oi hov wurrek to do to-night, me b'y."

"Work?" echoed the other, incredulously. "Now look here, don't go and tell me you're going to do red work, Ned Grogan!"

"But Oi am!" reiterated the Hercules, "whether yez bel'ave or not, be gorrah."

"What's the work, Ned?"

"Oi don't know as Oi sh'u'd be tellin' yez at all," demurred Ned.

After a good deal of persuasion and the pledge of secrecy on the part of the other, however, the big fellow was induced to divulge the nature of this work.

"Ye see," he began, "there's a man that has a box o' goold consaled somephwere out in the counthry, an' he wants me to go out wid 'im to fetch it away."

"A box of gold?" ejaculated his companion; "where did he get the box of gold?"

"Ax me who me great grandmother's aunt's step-daughter's forty-second coozen was, will yez?" interposed the giant impatiently. "How the divvil do Oi know? The gentleman hired me to help him wid the box, and not to ax questions."

"The probabilities are that he stole it, I should say," retorted the other sarcastically. "The fact of his having it hidden away like that goes a long way to prove that."

"Wurra, an' suppose he did stale it? Phwat is that to me? It's not meself that'll have to go to confession or ax for absolution for him! But, Oi must be goin', Larry," he broke off suddenly. "Oi hav' to be on hand at tin, an' it's a long ways to phwere Oi hav' to go."

"Look out you don't get into trouble, Ned," was his friend's parting admonition.

As the big fellow left the bar-room Thad arose and sauntered carelessly after him.

That the work of removing the gold was a part and parcel of the great case he was engaged upon he had not the least doubt, and so of course, determined to learn as much about it as possible.

When the giant reached the street he turned east and proceeded on foot along Madison street.

It was now apparent to Thad that the fellow intended walking the whole distance, and while he himself did not relish the idea of following the example, there was no way out of it, if he wished to keep the fellow in sight.

Up to and through the tunnel the big man continued, past the spot where Thad had had the skirmish the previous night; then toward the East side of the city, until he reached La Salle street.

There, to the shadower's surprise, a buggy was standing in the very spot where he had seen the carriage on the previous night.

Without more ado the big Celt climbed into this buggy and seated himself, though the horse was still hitched to the curb; so it was evident that another person was expected.

Thad waited, but it occurred to him that he had better be prepared to travel when the party should arrive; so he walked to the corner of Fifth avenue, a block away, where there was a hack-stand, and securing a cab, had the cabman drive down Madison street to La Salle.

Big Ned's companion had just joined him, and they were on the point of driving away when Thad arrived.

He gave the driver orders to keep the buggy in sight wherever it went, and the chase commenced.

To Thad's surprise, the buggy turned south when it reached Clark street, whereas he expected it to go west.

The buggy continued south for several

blocks; then it turned west, crossed the river, went four or five blocks in that direction, thence north a short distance, again east, and recrossed the river, this time on the Randolph street bridge. Finally reaching Clark street again, it turned north this time.

"Thim fellas is out for their health, Oi'm thinkin'," observed the cabby, when he saw this latest freak.

But, Thad knew they had a very different motive—and that was to throw any possible shadowers off the track.

Nearly two hours had been consumed in this winding about, and it was now approaching midnight.

There was no more turning after this, but the buggy continued on out North Clark street for several miles.

At length there was a swamp reached—a dark, dismal swamp—and the buggy, which was some distance ahead, there stopped; so Thad ordered the cab driver to pull up, and he alighted and walked down the road in the direction of the buggy.

As he cautiously approached he beheld a light in the bushes some distance from the road, and heard the sound as of some one digging. There was also a coach standing in the road near the buggy.

Thad concealed himself and waited.

CHAPTER XVI.

A NEAT PLAY.

THAD was at a loss to understand the meaning of the coach in this place.

This was a part of the programme he had heard nothing about, and he could not understand it.

He was not to be kept long in suspense, however, for in a very little while he was surprised to see the dark forms of the dozen or more "Twisters" as they jumped from the coach.

When they had disappeared into the thicket the detective crept a short way in and listened.

Presently he heard a tussle between two men very close to him, so he concluded that the outlaws were having a fight between themselves, and returned to the road, and turned the buggy round.

Here he remained until Dockey's men came out with the treasure, and was so close to Dockey when he whispered his instructions to Duggan as to catch every word of it.

Thad then moved quietly to the opposite side of the buggy and waited till the men had placed the box in the buggy, and then quickly mounted to the seat.

It was then that he discovered the outlines of Duggan's form coming up on the other side, and planted a terrific blow between the outlaw's eyes.

The detective then hastily gathered up the lines, gave the lash to the horse, and dashed away like the wind.

As he passed the cab in which he had driven out, a short distance up the road, he called out to the driver to follow him, which the latter did.

This was to keep the outlaws in ignorance of who had gone with the buggy and how he had reached the spot.

Arriving in the city an hour before daylight, Thad drove directly to Police Headquarters, where he turned over his treasure and then went home.

He had also left the horse and buggy with the police.

During the forenoon the detective called at Headquarters, and he and the chief opened the treasure-box.

It was found to contain, not only an immense amount of gold bullion, but two cases of diamonds.

This was a great surprise to the police.

It was evident that they were the identical diamonds stolen by Winnifred Rayburn from the State street jeweler, and the puzzle to them was as to how they had got into this place.

It was all clear enough to Thad, however, and when the chief recalled what the detective had told him about the woman being Percival's wife, the truth began to dawn upon him.

"Well, old man," said Chief Granger, "you are getting pretty well to the end of two great cases at once, instead of one."

"No, I cannot say that I am," returned Burr. "I have recovered the stolen goods, that is certain. But the principal thing is yet to be accomplished. There has been a murder committed, and my work is not completed until the criminal is caught and brought to justice, and I fear that is a long way off."

"What makes you think so?"

"Because the culprit, as well as his wife, the diamond thief, has nothing to keep him here any longer, and they will doubtless skip the country on short notice. My opinion is that they were preparing for that, which is why the fellow was trying to remove the gold."

"I shouldn't wonder," coincided the chief.

"Another thing that leads me to the same conclusion, is the fact that they had given up their plot. A curse upon that stupid ass of a sergeant!" he suddenly broke off, the recollection coming so strong upon him that he could not resist a little profanity at the official's expense. "Only for him we should now have the woman safe, at any rate."

"Oh, well, I do not doubt but that you will soon be able to undo the stupid fellow's blunder," interjected the chief, soothingly. "Do not despair."

"I do not despair, but it is exasperating to have to do your work a second time. By the way, I do not see why we should not arrest that fellow Jules Revere as accessory for having misrepresented himself in order to get the woman off."

"Certainly, if you know him to have done such a thing, you are justifiable in procuring a warrant for him."

Acting upon this advice, Thad went to a police justice and procured a warrant for Jules Revere as accessory to Winnifred Rayburn's crime in the fact that he had falsely represented himself as her husband for the purpose of defrauding justice.

Then returning to the hotel and making a slight alteration in the appearance of his face, he took a cab and drove to the pretended doctor's house in Forest avenue.

Revere was in, and the detective served the warrant on him and took him into custody.

There was not the slightest show of resistance, to Thad's surprise, and the prisoner was taken to the city prison.

Here he made no demand to be admitted to bail, and he was locked up.

All this was a great surprise, both to the police and to Thad himself; but, knowing something of the character of the man, he did not doubt but there was something behind it.

He now believed that Winnifred's pretended contempt for Revere on the night of her arrest was affected.

After he had been behind the grates for two hours—long enough, Thad thought, to begin to reflect seriously upon his situation—the detective called upon him for an interview.

Revere received him with his usual cold politeness.

After some general remarks, the detective began:

"I was sorry to have to do this thing, Mr. Revere, but under the circumstances it was impossible to avoid it."

"Oh, don't allow your conscience to disturb you on my account," interposed the prisoner, affably. "I am aware that a man in your position has to do many unpleasant things."

"But, how came you to do such a thing? What defense do you propose to make for having represented yourself as another person, for the sake of liberating that woman?"

"You have answered your own question, sir," answered Revere, coolly. "For the sake of liberating that woman."

"And yet you knew her to be a criminal, of course?"

"I did," was the calm reply.

"Then, you must be under a heavy debt of gratitude to her for something?"

"Perhaps I am. Perhaps I am not. She told you the truth when she said that she had done me enough injury to justify me in killing her, and enough good to justify me in laying down my life for her. She did not tell exactly the truth, though, when she said that I was too great a coward to do either."

I could, and under certain circumstances would, do either."

Thad was puzzled.

In all his experience with criminals, he had never met one like this man, and for the moment was inclined to doubt his sanity.

"From what I have learned," resumed the detective, after a short pause, "this woman is your sister-in-law."

"Yes, sir," rejoined Revere, "my wife is her sister."

"And your wife has gone to England?"

"Yes."

"Where is this woman—Winnifred Rayburn—now?"

"That I cannot say."

"Do you mean that you do not know, or that you do not wish to tell?"

"I do not know. But if I did, I should not tell."

"Suppose your own liberty depended upon it?"

"That would not make the slightest difference."

"You would remain in jail, or even go to the Penitentiary, rather than divulge the secret, would you?"

"I would."

"Is this man Francis Perceval her lawful husband?" asked Thad, after another brief silence.

"Did you not see the marriage-certificate?" demanded the other, in lieu of an answer.

"Yes, I saw that, but—"

"That is as genuine a document as was ever drawn up," he interrupted. "My own is not more so, and I defy any man to question that."

"What is the character of this Percival?" questioned Burr.

"Very much the same as that of his wife," replied the tall man wearily.

"They are both criminals, then?"

"Yes."

"How comes it that you, an honest man, are mixed up with such people?"

Thad thought to appeal to the fellow's pride, but he answered with the same lack of feeling:

"That is an affair which would require too much time to answer. Your assumption that I am an honest man is gratuitous on your part. I do not deny it; I do not confirm it."

"But this man Percival is nothing to you, is he?"

"Nothing whatever."

"Not even a friend?"

Revere smiled faintly.

It was a bitter smile, and spoke volumes to the detective's experienced eye.

It seemed to tell of years of persecution, of betrayals, of deceit practiced upon him by this man.

"You would hardly call a man a friend," he said at length, "who would deliberately use your name for the carrying out of the basest designs, would you?"

"Scarcely," admitted Thad.

"Then you could not call Francis Percival my friend," he added, promptly.

"Why, then, do you not divulge his whereabouts, that he may be brought to justice?"

"Because I am not a traitor, whatever else I may be."

"You know something of his past career, don't you?"

"Pretty much all of it."

"Are you acquainted with the facts connected with the murder of Stephen B. Langford?"

Revere hesitated.

"No," he at length replied, "I am not."

"You know that Percival murdered him, of course?"

"No, I do not know that," he answered somewhat sullenly.

Revere was beginning to grow confused for the first time since Thad had known him.

"And yet you knew that he had registered at the United States Hotel in your name?"

"Yes—I knew that," he faltered.

"And you also knew that the same man who signed that register had shipped the trunk containing the dead body of Langford?"

"I supposed so," said the tall man, growing more and more confused.

"Did you not know it?"

"No, I can't say that I did," he stammered.

"Who else could have sent it?" persisted the detective.

"I say I supposed it was he."

"Very well, knowing, or supposing that much, you must have known that the same man committed the murder."

"I can't say that I did," he hesitated.

"You see, there are so many chances—"

"See here," interrupted Thad impatiently, "have you heard that the gold which had been stolen from the murdered man has been recovered?"

"Yes—yes, I had heard of it," he faltered.

"And of course you know it was in the possession of Percival?"

"I suppose it was."

"That is the admission I desired you to make, of all others," caught up Thad promptly. "The newspaper account of the affair, of last night did not mention Percival's name, for the very simple reason that it was not known to any one, not excepting myself, that the gold had been in his possession. So the only means of your knowing it was to obtain the information from Percival himself. Therefore, you do know that he is the murderer."

But instead of making the impression upon him that Thad expected, the fellow simply replied:

"I suppose so."

CHAPTER XVII.

SAD TWISTERS.

THE "Twisters" were a melancholy set when they returned to town that night, or morning rather.

Percival and Big Ned, notwithstanding their feeling of distrust toward the ruffians, contented themselves to take passage with them. It was their only choice, except walking.

Little conversation passed between them on the way.

Percival and Ned felt bitter toward the Twisters, for they believed it to be through their bad management or treachery that the unknown person was enabled to run away with the treasure.

On the other hand Docky suspected, after going over the matter in his own mind, that there had been treachery on the other side; that, in short, Percival and his pal had put up a job on them to keep from paying the promised ten thousand dollars.

However, each party kept his own counsel, for the time being, and when the coach arrived at the junction of the Coop and Clark street, the passengers alighted, Percival and Ned going on toward the city and the Twisters turning into the narrow lane that led to the "Growler."

It was understood at parting, however, that they were to meet the following night and talk over their mutual plans for the future.

Percival was somewhat averse to having the meeting take place at the "Growler," Docky's own abode, for he anticipated trouble, and he knew that in such an event, Docky would have all the advantage on his side.

But as Docky would hear to no other meeting-place, it was finally agreed that it should take place at the aforesaid resort.

By eleven o'clock on the following night (they rarely assembled before that hour) the back room of the Growler was pretty well filled with the usual motley crew, every person present being a member of the Twisters.

Percival and Ned had not yet put in an appearance.

Docky accepted his accustomed chair, behind one of the tables, and the usual tumbler of villainous whisky, half-emptied, sat before him.

The boss was glum and sullen and pulled away silently at a vile-smelling cigar and gazing into space.

Bloody Dugan sat on the opposite side of the table as usual, and he, too, wore an expression of dire discontent.

A long silence ensued, and then the lieutenant spoke.

"It's 'bout time de bloke was showin' up, ain't it, boss?" he uttered in that queer hoarse voice peculiar to this class of men.

"Dat is, if he's comin'."

"Yep," grunted Docky—"if he's comin', as youse says. In my 'pinion, de varmint won't show up, see?"

"Youse t'ink dere's somethin' crooked, do yer?"

"Dat's right."

"Dat's w'ot I t'ink, Docky."

"Yep," resumed the boss, after stopping long enough to moisten his lips with the decoction before him, "my 'pinion is dat de measley rat has trun us down."

"Dat's w'ot I t'ink," coincided the lieutenant, "and we was er lot o' galoots dat we didn't smash him an' dat big stuff wid 'im de first t'ing."

"Dat's right," growled Docky.

Another silence ensued, and then Dugan resumed:

"Wal, s'pose he has fluked, den w'ot, Dock?"

"Den's nuttin' fer us but ter lay fer 'im an' do 'im, if we ever run across 'im."

"Is dat all?"

"Dat's all."

Dugan meditated.

Presently he grunted:

"I know anudder scheme, Dock."

"W'ot's dat?" growled the boss hoarsely.

"Split," said Dugan, with a significant shrug.

"To de police?"

"Yep."

"W'ot good 'u'd dat do us?"

"Git de reward, 'sides de revenge."

"Yer might have de revenge, but de reward is off, I reckon."

"W'y so?"

"Dat included de recovery o' de swag. Dey've got de swag."

"But don't yer reckon dey'll give er good lump ter get His Nibs anyway?"

"Maybe."

"Lemme see, de reward offered by de jay's folks was fifty t'ousand. Now, s'posed dey've got de swag, as youse t'ink, don't yer reckon dey'll be willin' ter shade it down say ter ten t'ousand plunks fer de bloke?"

"I dunno," grunted Docky.

"If dey do," pursued the lieutenant, growing enthusiastic, "dat'll make it ekal to de divvy w'ot His Whiskers was to pay us."

"Yep," grunted Docky drowsily.

"But," persisted Dugan, "s'pose, as we t'ink, His Whiskers has played us dirt; s'pose, arter all, him, an' not de p'leece has got de swag?"

"Eh?"

Docky opened his eyes, and began to exhibit an interest in Dugan's speculations.

"S'pose, I say," continued the lieutenant, "dat Percy has de boodle?"

"Dat's right," exclaimed the boss, who was wide awake now.

"An' we find dat he's trun us down?"

"Yep."

"Fifty t'ousand plunks, eh, old rocks?"

"Dat's right."

"Phwat's this? Who's that yez'll be afther splittin' an'?"

Both men sprung to their feet.

Standing before them was the towering form of Big Ned Grogan.

The two outlaws were dumb.

More than that, they were paralyzed with terror.

The big Irishman had never appeared to possess such gigantic proportions before, nor had his voice seemed so loud and terrible.

"So yez'd be afther splittin' on the boss, w'u'd yez, ye durthy spalpeens! It wasn't enough that yez throid to rin away wid the boodle out yonder beyant; but now that yez got b'ate an' the bobbies got the swag, yez'd be afther doin' the Judas act. Fax, if there was a r'ale man amongst yez, Oi'd ate 'im for exerceize!"

With that the big Irishman plumped himself down on a chair and struck the table such a blow with his sledge-hammer fist as to send the glasses dancing about like tops, and caused Docky and his lieutenant to blanch with terror.

"Sit down, ye divvils! sit down!" roared Big Ned, in a voice that made the walls of the rookery tremble.

Docky and Dugan complied meekly.

It was then for the first time noticed that Percival was with him, and he sunk upon a seat near his gigantic pal.

"Now, gintlemin, phwat air yez goin' to

hav? Mintion yer poison. Docky, if yez hov sich a thing as a dacint dhrop in yer shebeen, throt it out, an' be quick about it!"

With an unsteady voice, the boss ordered his barkeeper to help the gentlemen to such beverages as they might select, and the order was promptly complied with.

"Now, gints," said Ned, raising his glass between himself and the light to examine its contents, "here's to the man that is a man, an' divvil take the man that isn't!"

With that he swallowed a portion of the contents of the glass, but instantly spat it out, coughed, choked and sputtered, and finally, catching his breath, roared:

"Howly saints! phwat the divvil's thot yez give me, Docky, ye thafe?"

"It's nuttin' but whisky," grunted the boss, with a dogged wag of the head.

"Whusky, is it?" roared the big Irishman. "Divvil the dhrop o' whusky's in thot. Be the soul av me grandmother, it tastes more loike sulphuric acid and butther-milk. Be me troth, it'd burren the legs off an iron stove! Hov yez nothin' betther in yer auld shebeen?"

"Patsey," called Docky, "fetch de gent de bottle wid the yaller label on it. Dat's some I keeps fer sickness," explained the boss.

"Fer sickness, is it?" cried Ned. "Och, sure, an' if the stuff in t'other bottle won't make yez sick enough, Oi'm a Dutchman!"

When he had poured out some of the contents of the other bottle and tasted it cautiously, he said:

"Och, thot is more loike it. A man could sit 'long soide o' thot without losin' his timper or burnin' his whiskers. Thot's something loike the potheen of the auld sod. Here's the hair off yer head, Docky, ye thafe o' the worreid."

"Good luck, Ned," responded Docky, tamely.

"Drink hairty," cried Ned, tossing off his liquid.

When they had all finished and put down their glasses, and Ned had settled with the barkeeper, the big fellow said:

"Now, gents, phat's it about somebody doin' yez dirret, that Oi hear about?"

There was a profound silence for some moments, and then Docky ventured:

"Me an' Blad dere was chinnin', an' we kinder wondered who de bloke was dat runned off wid de swag, see? an' I said to Blad, I said, 'Hully chee!' I said, 'kin it be possible,' I said, 'dat dem hon'ble gents,' I says, 'is forgot deirsilves,' I says, 'an' trun us down,' I says. An' de t'ought o' sich a t'ing from sich hon'ble gents made me tired, an' den Blad dere, he got r'iled, an' he says, 'If dey've trun us down,' he says, 'dere's only one t'ing for us,' he says, 'an' dat's to split.' But o' course youse gents knows we wouldn't do no sich t'ing, see?"

Big Ned drew a long breath, and then said:

"No, yez wouldn't nivver split, any av yez, unless yez got a good chance, and that's throe for yez. Docky, phawat yez've told is lois—ivvery worred av it, an' yez know it. Ye murdherin' thafe! did yez think Oi didn't hear ivvery worred of yer plot to be-thray us? An' didn't yez know thot Oi was anto yer murdherin' schame in the swamp beyant to be-thray us, and run away wid the goold? Ye thafe o' the wourld, if yez was the tinth part of a mon Oi'd ate yez!"

And it looked as if the big Irishman intended to make a meal off the outlaw as it was, for as he ceased speaking he grasped Docky by the throat, shook him till his teeth rattled like castanets, and choked him till he was blue in the face, and then threw him aside like a limp rag, and resumed his seat.

But he did not retain it long, for as soon as Docky could regain his feet and voice, he gave vent to a peculiar yell of mingled distress and malignance that had the effect of instilling some life into his lethargic pals, and they sprung up with a howl and made for the big Irishman.

But it was a dismal failure.

The giant stood there cool and deliberate, and his great arm swung with the regularity and precision of a great piston, and whatever it came in contact with went down.

In the space of three minutes half the inmates of the room were on the floor and

the remainder intimidated into kitten-like docility.

"Now," said big Ned, when quiet was once more restored, "Oi want to tell yez that the boodle's in the hands of the police, and that's an ind av that. As for the boss here," indicating Percival, "he's acted square all the way t'rough, and Oi'll take care av him. All Oi ask is that yez'll not split before to-morrow noight, whin he'll be across the bordher into her Majesty's dominion; afther that yez kin peach all yez loike. But moind, if yez split before that time, look out for yersilves. Come on, boss."

And the two men left the saloon, Percival never having opened his mouth once.

CHAPTER XVIII.

SPLITTING ON THE BOSS.

"DERE's a precious pair," sneered Docky, as soon as Percival and Big Ned were out of the door. "I'd jes' like ter have dat big bloke w're I could git at 'im once!"

"Dat's me," chimed in Duggan. "If I'd 'a' got a show at de big animal I'd 'a' knocked him cold, but I couldn't git at 'im fer de crowd."

"Same here," put in another party, who was doing his best to get out of the room during the *melee*; "if I could got in jes' one of my left-handers, the big brute would have had to be taken away in the ambulance."

"It sthroikes me," interjected Dennis Dolan, who sat nursing a battered head, "that the big fella managed to git at a miny o' yez, whether yez got at him or not."

"Faix he did that," added Red Maher, whose nose had suffered a serious contusion in consequence of running amuck of Ned's fist; "bad 'cess till the murdherin' divvil. He'd as soon ate a man as look at him."

"W'ot's to be done, boss?" interposed Duggan, at this point. "De blamed t'ings is done us up, and done us up bad, an' I, for one, want revenge."

"Same here," growled Docky.

"W'en does she go?"

"Right off."

"Ter-night?"

"Yep."

"An' stand de consekences?"

"Dat's right."

"Here goes, den," said Duggan, rising. "Who goes wid me?"

Half a dozen men volunteered to accompany the lieutenant, and after taking another stiff horn to give them courage, the crowd left the saloon.

The men made straight for Police Headquarters.

It was very quiet at the Headquarters when they entered.

It was after midnight and the chief had long since gone home, so Duggan, who was the spokesman, addressed himself to the sergeant in charge.

"I s'pose youse'd like ter know who de bloke was dat killed de jay w'ot was found in de trunk, wouldn't yer?"

The sergeant regarded the outlaw with great disfavor for a moment, and then asked:

"Did you do it?"

"Nope," grunted Duggan, "I didn't do it, see; but I knows de bloke w'ot done it."

"You were accessory, then?"

"W'ot's dat?"

"You were accessory to the crime; that is, you had something to do with it."

"Nope, I didn't have nothin' to do wid it," objected Duggan scornfully.

"How did you happen to know who did it, then?"

"Wal, now say," grumbled the outlaw, "if youse wants ter know anything 'bout dis racket, all right, if yer don't jes say so, an' dat goes. But don't try ter use de stummick pump on me, see, cause if yer do, yer won't git nothin' but wind fer yer trouble."

"If you refuse to tell how you came by the information," persisted the sergeant, "how am I to tell whether you are telling the truth or not?"

"Oh, dat don't make no difference whedder I tell de truth or not, so's youse gits de bloke w'ot done de job."

"That is true enough, but why do you wish to betray this man?"

"W'ot's dat?"

"Why do you wish to give this man away?"

"Oh, why do I want ter split?"

"That is it."

"Cause de sunfish trun me and me pal down, see?"

"He did what?" queried the sergeant, mystified.

"He trun us down—pulled de string—done us dirt—see?"

"Oh, he didn't act squarely, is that it?"

"Dat's right; he gived us de dead cold, see?"

"I see. So you want to give him away to the police?"

"Dat's right."

"Well, the best thing you can do is to come round to-morrow, when the chief is here, and he will take you before a magistrate and have you make your statement under oath."

"Oh, but dat won't do, see."

"Why not?"

"De game'll be gone afore den. If yer want 'im, youse'll hafter trap 'im ter-night."

"He is preparing to leave, then?"

"Yep."

"Well, in that case, I will call up the chief and consult him about it."

The sergeant went to the telephone, called up the chief of police and stated the case, and then, turning to Duggan, said:

"Just wait here a little while, when the chief will be down, and you can talk to him about the matter."

Duggan waited for some time, but he soon began to get nervous, and wanted the sergeant to jog the chief up.

But he had not long to wait, when the chief appeared.

The outlaw made his statement; told the name of the man—Percival—who had committed the murder and robbery; but, when asked where the man was to be found, he was found to be as ignorant as the police themselves.

That was a point upon which Percival had never enlightened them.

However, Duggan told about the United States Hotel, and gave it as his opinion that the man might be found there.

After making a note of what the fellow had told, and taken his name and address—the latter being the "Growler," No. 18, The Coop—the outlaw and his pals were allowed to depart.

As Duggan left the Headquarters he noticed a man standing in the shadow some distance from the door.

It was too dark to discern what the man resembled, even if he had been looking in the outlaw's direction, but his face was averted.

The sight, nevertheless, gave Duggan a start, although he had no reason to think the fellow had any design upon him.

The outlaw and his pals moved quickly away from the station, but they had not proceeded far before Duggan discovered that the unknown man was following them.

The discovery gave the cowardly outlaw a shiver, for he at once recalled big Ned Grogan's warning.

When they reached Clark street, and found that the shadower was still at their heels, and not very far behind, Duggan concluded to give him the slip. So whispering his design to his men, instead of turning north along Clark street, Duggan kept on East, crossed Dearborn and State streets, and finally Michigan avenue, and a little later came to the lake front.

They had walked rapidly and without looking behind them after leaving Clark street, and now when they reached the brink of Lake Michigan, he was nowhere in sight.

It was a beautiful moonlit night, and a brisk, crisp breeze swept over the lake, raising the crystal-green waters into gentle billows, which sparkled and shimmered in the moonlight like molten gold, mingled with gems.

Even these hardened men could not avoid a sense of awe and a thrill of pleasure in the contemplation of this scene of peace and beauty.

Indeed, they became so absorbed in it, that they forgot, for the instant, their surroundings, and the impending danger which had driven them there, until they were suddenly awakened from their dream by the sound of footsteps close at hand.

Duggan was the first to hear the footsteps, and consequently the first to turn, and the sight that met him caused him to tremble violently.

Standing before him, brought out in strong relief by the moonlight, was big Ned Grogan!

The gigantic Irishman stood there coolly regarding the seven outlaws with a half-grin on his broad features.

"Wal," he began in his stentorian voice, "phwat air yez thaves thinkin' about? Joomping into the lake, to save the State the expinse of hangin' yez?"

Duggan, with a desperate effort, forced a feeble smile, and said:

"Hullo, Ned, old boy, is dat youse?"

"No, it's me grandmother's daughter's laddybuck, ye bla'guard!" retorted Ned.

"Hully chee, Ned!" grinned Duggan, "but I'm glad to see yer!"

"Ye're a loiar, ye thafe o' the wooreld!" shouted Ned, savagely. "Yez'd rather see the Ould Nick this minit, wid a two-pronged fork, than meself—faith, and yez would; be-kaze yez know Oi'll ate yez."

Ned paused, spat fiercely and glared at the group of terrified outlaws.

Duggan, as white as a ghost and trembling in every fiber, still struggled to smile and treat the matter lightly.

"Youse is sich a joker, Ned," he muttered, but his voice quavered painfully. "Come on over to de Growler and have somethin', old feller."

"No, Oi'll go to no Growler to git something, to-noight," growled the big fellow. "Phwat Oi want, Oi'll hov roight here, d'ye moind? And phwat Oi want is blood! D'ye moind that?"

Duggan had grown suddenly grave by this time, but he could not muster sufficient courage to speak.

"So yez wint and split, did ye?" resumed Ned. "In spoite av me warning, yez squealed to the polace, ye durthy divil!"

"No, no! ye're mistaken, Ned," pleaded the outlaw piteously, "I only—"

"Sthop!" roared Ned savagely. "Phwat d'yez ixpect to gain be lyin'? Sure, Oi know ivvery woored yez tould the sergeant yander, it's no use lyin' to me. Now, phwat d'yez think Oi ought to do wid yez? Murdher yez outright, or b'ate yez to death? Yez kin hav' yer choice. Or, if yez are partic'lar, Oi'll compromise, and ate yez raw."

"Oh, mercy!" pleaded Duggan, falling upon his knees before the giant. "Have mercy on me, Ned, dear Ned! It wasn't me dat perposed de splittin', it was Docky, an' he made me do it, see."

"Ye're a loiar!" yelled Ned, grasping the wretch by the throat. "If yez'd a-tould me the thruth, Oi moight a-spared yez; but ye black-haired thafe, ye thry to put the blame an somebody else, and now yez'll pay for it, bad 'cess to yez!"

With that he began punching the wretch unmercifully.

"Murder! murder!" yelled Duggan at the top of his voice.

"Ye black-haired divvil! that's phwat Oi'll do wid yez," muttered the big Irishman, as he knelt on the outlaw's breast and hammered him. "Oi'll murdher yez!"

"Murder! murder! help!" yelled Duggan.

But instead of his companions coming to his aid, they had taken to their heels and run away.

It looked as if Ned would carry out his threat.

The outlaw's cries grew weaker and weaker, and there appeared to be no probability of the big Irishman letting up on him as long as life lasted.

But suddenly there was a change in the scene.

Busily engaged as he was in his murderous work, Ned's ears were too acute to escape the sound of footsteps, and, releasing his victim, sprung to his feet.

Before him stood a man in plain clothes, considerably smaller than himself, but as solid and compact as a oak.

The men glanced at each other for an instant, and then the new-comer said, in a calm tone of voice:

"Edward Grogan, you are my prisoner!"

In lieu of a reply, the Irish giant swung his big fist and aimed a sledge-hammer blow at the man's head, but to his utter astonishment, it never reached its destination.

The other man parried the blow as easily as if it had been that of a child, and in return, delivered the big fellow one between the eyes that staggered him.

And before Ned could recover himself, the other followed him up with a series of catapult-like blows, that soon put him to sleep.

Then before he could regain his feet, Thad Burr—for he it was—had clasped the irons on the giant's wrists.

"Now, come along, my good fellow," said Thad, "and the next time you feel like expending your surplus muscle, take one of your size."

"Howly saints! but yez air a divil fer haird hittin'," observed Ned, as Thad led him away.

CHAPTER XIX.

IMPORTANT FACTS.

THAD used all his arts as he went along with big Ned to induce him to make some disclosures with regard to the whereabouts of Percival, but it was in vain.

The loyal fellow would not utter one word which was likely to betray his master.

Neither did the fellow appear in the least apprehensive regarding the fate of the murderer.

When pressed, he finally said, in an exultant tone:

"Niver moind, the boss'll be across the bordher in the Quane's dominion before any of you bobbies'll get yer hands on him."

This set Thad to thinking, and he could not help wondering what manner of man this Percival must be that he wielded such a power over men, and he began to understand now the meaning of Revere's conduct. This man evidently exercised some sort of hypnotic power over every one that came in his way.

When they attempted to search Ned before locking him up he made a determined resistance, and it was not until half a dozen of the strongest men got hold of him and threw him down, ironed as he was, that they succeeded in securing the contents of his pockets.

And yet there was nothing found on his person that threw any particular light on the case, more than the detective already possessed.

There was a letter written to Grogan from Percival from St. Louis in which allusion was made to the murder, but in such vague terms that had Thad not already possessed the information he did, it would have been utterly incomprehensible to him.

True there was a card on which were pencilled the words:

"Call at 35 M. for squawker. She will you rest."

Thad knew that, in the rogue parlance "squawker" meant a baby or child, but it was impossible to surmise where 35 M. was.

Nevertheless he put the card into his pocket with the vague hope that it might prove useful at some time or other.

There was a bunch of keys which Ned begged hard not to have taken away from him, but Thad persisted in taking for that very reason.

One of these keys subsequently proved to belong to the lock of the chest which had contained the gold.

This served as a bit of evidence against Percival.

Another one of the keys had the figures and initial "35 M." stamped on it.

It appeared to be the key of a room-door, and Thad used his utmost endeavors to induce or intimidate the Irishman into revealing where it belonged.

"It's nothin' that 'd do yez any good if yez knowed it," was his answer.

"In that case you can have no objection to telling," insisted the detective.

"It's for that same rayson that Oi'll not be telling yez," retorted Ned.

"But you forget that this man is guilty of murder," interjected Thad impressively, "and in shielding him you lay yourself liable to the same punishment as himself."

"Is that so?" demanded Ned, looking the detective straight in the eye to ascertain whether he was in earnest or not.

Thad put on a very serious countenance.

"Certainly," he replied.

"And Oi'm loiable to be hanged for not tellin'?"

"You certainly are."

Thad imagined the fellow was weakening, but his next words disabused his mind.

"Wal," he said, dryly, "if Oi'm to be hanged for loyalty to me friend, so be it. Yez niver seen a thrue Irishman that'd split on a friend, and phwat ever else Oi may be, Oi'm a thrue Irishman."

Thad saw that there was no use of urging the fellow further after that, and left him.

On returning to his hotel, Burr raked his brain for a solution of the mystic figures and initial on the card, and the corresponding ones on the key.

But the night was spent and the light of a new day was streaming in at the window, and still the mystery remained unsolved.

At length it occurred to him that possibly the man whom he had rescued from the hands of big Ned the night previous might be able to give him some information on the subject.

After an early breakfast, therefore, he called at Police Headquarters and got the address of Duggan, and after a good deal of hunting, at length succeeded in locating first the "Coop," and then the "Growler."

Unfortunately there was nobody about the place except the barkeeper, and he did not appear inclined to talk.

After a liberal bribe, however, and the assurance that he personally was not "wanted," Patsey finally volunteered the information that "some o' de blokes sleeps up dere," pointing toward the ceiling, which Thad understood to mean in the only additional story to the rookery above the saloon.

"An' I reckon yer might find Blud up dere," he supplemented, "though from de shape he was in when he showed up dis mornin', he ain't goin' ter be in no shape ter chin."

"Was he in bad shape?" queried Thad.

"Bad shape? Hully chee! yer jist orter seen 'im! Say, he looked like he'd been doin' a turn wid a sausage-macheen an' de macheen had done 'im, see?"

"Been fighting, I suppose?" ventured the detective.

"Nope, I don't t'ink he'd been fightin', but de udder feller had."

"Well, suppose you call him down; tell him a friend—the one that helped him out last night, wants to see him."

"Did youse help him out?" questioned Patsey curiously, looking at Thad in awe.

"Yes."

"Hully chee! Say, youse must be a good one! Blud says yer knocked de big duffer cold, and he's no infant."

"No, not much of an infant, but call Duggan down, please."

The barkeeper left the room by the back way, and Burr soon heard the rickety stairs creaking under him as he ascended.

A little later he heard a terrific rumpus overhead, as if there was a fight going on.

But the barkeeper at length returned, smiling, and said that Duggan would soon be down.

When that gentleman did put in an appearance, Thad saw that the barkeeper's description had been no exaggeration.

He was the worst used-up mortal the detective had ever beheld.

"That chap handled you pretty roughly last night," observed Thad.

"Yep," grunted Duggan. "He was after me meat-house, an' d'a' got it. I reckon, only for youse."

"He's a pretty hard bitter, eh, old man?"

"Yep. But he ain't in it wid youse. Say, youse is a holy terror, youse is!"

Thad produced the bunch of keys, and selecting the one with the stamp on it, showed it to the lieutenant.

"Did you ever see that key?" he asked.

"Nope, I dunno as I ever did," was the musing response.

"You couldn't guess, then, what that number and letter stand for?"

"Lemme see," mused Duggan, examining it still closer. "35 M? Seems kinder familiar like, an' yit I can't jest—oh, yes! I have it!" he suddenly exclaimed. "Dat's de

very key big Ned was a-showin' us one night."

"Did he mention where it belonged?"

"Lemme see—seems ter me he did, but I forgit. Youse recollect, don't yer, Patsey?" he said, referring to the barkeeper.

"I forgit," growled the latter. "Say, didn't he say sometin' 'bout a lunatic asylum, or sometin'?"

"Dat's it!" exclaimed Duggan. "It was a lunatic asylum."

"But what is the 'M' for?" asked Thad.

"Dat's where yer've got me," grinned the lieutenant. "It was somethin' 'bout a lunatic asylum, an' dat's all I know 'bout it."

"Very well, gentlemen," said Thad. "I guess I can find out the rest. Much obliged to you for the information."

Thad was about to take his leave, when Duggan called him back and asked:

"How did yer come ter be on hand last night, cap'n?"

"Why, it happened that I called at Headquarters a few minutes after you were there (as a matter of fact, the chief had telephoned for him), and seeing that you were being shadowed, I concluded to shadow your shadower."

"An' it was a lucky t'ing for me yer did," put in Duggan.

After leaving the "Growler," Burr took a cab and drove to Revere's house in Forest avenue.

But when he arrived he discovered that the place was in the hands of the police.

A policeman was stationed in front of the door, and another occupied a seat in the parlor, and the detective was refused admission.

It was therefore necessary for him to return to Headquarters for permission to enter the house.

Returning with his permit, Thad set about searching the premises.

He soon explored the first and second floors, but when he tried to ascend to the third he found the stairway closed with a heavy door, and this door was securely locked.

Upon inquiry of the servants he was told that that floor was reserved by Revere for his violent patients, and that nobody was ever allowed to go up there.

According to the same authority, there were at that very time quite a number of patients up there, and they were in an extremely violent state.

Thad smiled to himself, and then examined his keys.

The key marked "35 M" could hardly be the one for this great door, and when he tried it, he found that it was not.

One of the servants finally admitted that there was a large key in the master's room which was supposed to belong to the door, although none of the servants had ever dared to make use of it; and they advised him not to do so, if he valued his life.

Notwithstanding the admonition, he took the key and, finding that it did fit the lock, opened the door and ascended the stairs.

CHAPTER XX.

A GRUESOME ABODE.

WHEN Burr had ascended to the top of the stairs, which were plain and uncarpeted, he saw a sumptuously carpeted hall, which was flanked on either side by a number of doors, leading, apparently, into as many rooms.

He tried several of the doors and found them locked.

He then noticed that each door was lettered.

This reminded him of his key, and looking along until he arrived at the letter M, he applied the key and found that it unlocked the door.

Before opening the door, however, Thad paused, put his ear close to it, and listened attentively.

There was no sound from within.

Then he examined the key again, and wondered what the figures "35" meant.

But he did not speculate on the mystery long, and opening the door, entered the room.

But, instead of one small room, as he expected, he found a very long room, or rather a succession of rooms, connected by arches,

which arches were closed by curtains or *portieres*.

The place was very quiet, indicating that no one was there, but from appearances the place had been recently occupied.

After listening for some time and satisfying himself that nobody was in the apartment into which he had come, Thad pushed aside the *portiere* at one end of the chamber, and peeped into the next.

That also was unoccupied, and after satisfying himself on this point, he moved on to the third, and so on, until he had completed the row from the center to the end.

He then retraced his steps to the first compartment he had entered and worked his way to the other end of the room.

Up to this time he had only taken a casual look at the rooms, his principal object being to ascertain whether they were occupied or not.

On his return to Room M, from which he had originally started, he gave more attention to the rooms themselves.

And the further he proceeded, the more his wonder grew.

In the first place, the apartments were magnificently furnished, the furniture being of the rarest and most expensive, the pictures the choicest, the *bric-a-brac* such as could only be collected by a very rich person; but this was not what caused the detective's greatest wonder.

In every compartment, and in every corner of each compartment, were to be seen some species of reptile.

In one place, coiled up on a mat, would be an immense boa; in another, an alligator; perched upon a pedestal, where you might look for a parrot or a mocking-bird, would bask a great shining scorpion or lizard.

On the floor were terrapins, on the walls, dozing amid the meshes of a fish-net, were centipedes and tarantulas.

And they were all alive!

From niches in the walls and from brackets grinned skeletons or skulls.

"What manner of man or woman must it be who occupies this gruesome abode!" mused Thad.

There was not a bird, a cat, or any of the ordinary pets to be found in households, while all the hideous reptiles to be found in any part of the world had their representative here.

After completing the turn for the second time, it occurred to the detective that he had only half completed his inspection.

On the opposite side of the hall, he remembered, there was another row of rooms which, from an exterior view, seemed to be similar to the one through which he had passed.

But the question was how to get in there.

And then, he thought, possibly the tenants were in that side.

Thad stepped across the hall, placed his ear to the door of one of the rooms, and listened.

All was as quiet as the place he had just left.

He next tried the door, but, like those on the other side of the hall, it was locked.

He even tried his key, but it would not fit.

He then noticed that, instead of letters, there were numbers on this side, and he lost no time in hunting up "35."

There were not as many rooms as that, but there was a door numbered 35, and the detective tried his key in the lock.

To his delight it fit, and the bolt was thrown.

Burr entered this side with more trepidation than he had the other, for he felt sure he should find somebody in here.

But his apprehensions soon proved to be groundless, for, after making a tour of the rooms, which were exactly similar to those of the other suite, he was forced to the conclusion that these, too, were temporarily untenanted.

Still, there were the same signs of the place being occupied, for here, too, were numberless pets, some of which required daily attendance.

But there were no reptiles on this side.

The taste for pets here appeared to run to animals, but of the most hideous and loathsome character.

There were monkeys, porcupines, armadillos, sloths, polecats, rats, and the like

but not a single agreeable or attractive animal in the collection.

Aside from the pets, the furnishing of the apartments was pretty much the same as the other, except that the pictures were all of a hideous character.

Scenes from the Inquisition and the guillotine, hangings, and the various modes of execution in different countries.

Besides this, the walls were hung with various kinds of weapons and implements of torture, handcuffs, and even a few scalps.

Thad had become lost in the contemplation of this strange commingling of the horrible and the beautiful, the grotesque and the harmonious, and had become so absorbed as to forget where he was, when he was suddenly awakened from his reverie by a ripple of feminine laughter.

The detective started violently, for not only was the laughter unexpected and out-of-place here, but it was of such a discordant nature as to have grated upon a sensitive ear in any place.

Thad looked in the direction from which it had emanated, and was not a little surprised to behold Winnifred Rayburn standing there.

The manner in which he had started on hearing the peal of laughter had caused the woman to repeat it, and when she had recovered from this second fit of merriment, she said in a cheerful tone:

"Well, sir, what do you think of my collection?"

"It has the merit of novelty, at least," replied Thad dryly. "But I did not expect to find you here, Miss Rayburn."

"Neither did you find me here," she said, still smiling. "It was I that found you here."

"Well, yes, you are right about that," rejoined the detective, slightly abashed. "For to tell the truth, after making a thorough search of your apartments, I would have sworn that no living being—"

"Except the snakes and monkeys," she interposed.

"Yes, except the snakes and monkeys was to be found in the place."

"And yet, you see there was."

"Yes, I see that—there is now," he amended. "Of course it would do no good to ask you from what skylight you dropped or through what trap-door you were shot up?"

"No, it would do you no good to ask, because I should not tell you. But perhaps you will tell me, first, how you got in here, second, how you came to find the place, and third, what you want here."

"To your first question, I answer that I came in the manner that people usually enter houses—through the door, first having taken the precaution to unlock and open it. To your second question I must give the same kind of an answer that you did me a moment ago."

"In other words, it is none of my business how you found the place. Very well, your answer to my last question?"

"I have come for two purposes: first, to arrest you, and second to find and arrest your husband."

"What, want to arrest me again?" she laughed. "I thought you had had enough of that before."

"Not quite."

"You want some more of my subtlety, do you?"

"Your subtlety will not serve you so well this time, I assure you."

"Why so?"

"Because, for one thing, you will not have Jules Revere to help you, and for another, instead of going before a stupid sergeant as you did before, you will go before the chief of police himself."

"Is that true?" she cried gleefully.

Thad was surprised at this exhibition, but answered:

"Yes."

"That is good!" she exclaimed.

"Why?"

"Because my friend Granger will not dare to hold me."

"Don't plume yourself too much on that, my good woman," retorted Burr. "The chief of police will not dare to refuse to hold you, especially on the charge which I have against you."

"What is that?"

"Complicity in the murder of Stephen B. Langford!"

For the first time since he had known her, Winnifred Rayburn evinced indications of agitation.

She actually turned pale, and her hand trembled somewhat as she raised it to protest against this accusation.

"He cannot hold me on that charge," she declared, vehemently, "because there is no proof of it."

"Oh, yes, there is," smiled Thad, tauntingly, "ample proof, and he is in possession of it."

"Where did he get it?"

"I procured it for him."

"It is impossible!" she cried, passionately.

"Why impossible?"

"Because—because—I am innocent."

Thad considered this a good point to get in his fine work.

"He did it alone, then, did he?" he questioned, in a calm tone.

She stared at him for a moment without answering, and finally said:

"No, he did not do it either."

"Who did not do it?" he laughed.

"The person whom you accuse," she stammered, growing confused.

"But, my dear woman, I have accused no one."

"Oh, but I am well aware whom you would accuse," she muttered.

"I cannot see how you can say that. By the way, whom do you guess I would accuse?"

"I shall not say, because you will interpret it as an evidence of guilt."

"There is but one person I could accuse as principal, madam," he returned, gruffly, "and that is Francis Percival, your husband! As accomplice, Winnifred Rayburn, his wife."

"It is a lie!" she screamed.

"Is it?" he retorted. "Then read that letter, which is in your handwriting, and which you sent to the Southern Hotel, St. Louis, while he was there for the purpose of committing the murder."

This was one of the letters taken from big Ned's pocket, and was the one of which Thad had taken a copy while in St. Louis.

The woman took the letter, blanched, and attempted to tear the letter to pieces, but Burr caught it from her in time to save it.

"I never saw the letter before," she uttered spitefully. "It is a base forgery!"

"If that is true, madam, why did you try to tear it up?"

"Oh, they will doubtless use it against me."

"Well, forgery or genuine, madam, there is one way of preventing me from using it against you," said Thad, good-naturedly.

"How is that?" she gasped, brightening up.

She thought she saw a chance for bribery, evidently.

"By divulging the whereabouts of your husband," he returned.

The woman was up in an instant.

She glanced at him like a tigress.

"Not if I were to be hanged a thousand times would I do it to save myself!" she uttered firmly.

Thad handcuffed her.

CHAPTER XXI.

A CLOSE CALL.

THAD had no difficulty in landing his game behind the bars this time.

In spite of her boast that the chief of police would not dare to hold her, she did not so much as ask for him, and she was committed by the sergeant on presentation of the warrant with a demurrer.

She did not even ask to be allowed to procure bondsmen, although she did ask to see Jules Revere, but upon being told that that was impossible, she quietly went to prison without the least show of emotion.

"She takes her medicine coolly," remarked the turnkey on his return from locking her in.

"Oh, she thinks the jig's up," rejoined one of the policemen. "It would do her no good to escape now, anyway, as we've got possession of the swag."

The more Thad reflected upon the mys-

terious disappearance of Winnifred Rayburn in the apartments after he had searched them and found nobody, the more fully convinced he became that there was a way of getting into and out of the place besides the doors.

It was reasonable to conclude, therefore, that Percival would still use the place as a refuge—in case he was still in the city.

At all events, this was the only place the detective could think it likely that he would go, since his break with the "Twisters" and the capture of his gigantic pal, big Ned.

He therefore concluded to turn his entire attention in this direction, but before going to take up his abode there, as he intended ultimately to do, he called upon the chief for a consultation.

The chief had not yet recovered from his surprise at Thad arresting this woman under the very nose of the police whom he had sent to guard the house, when they did not even suspect that there was anybody in the house.

"You may be sure," said the chief, "that Captain Dillon will not allow the man to get into the place without putting the darbies on him."

Thad laughed.

"Possibly not," he said. "But how did it happen that the woman got in without his knowledge?"

"I confess that that was rather a strange affair; but the fact of his being fooled before will put the captain on his guard more than ever."

"The fact of his being fooled before, chief, in broad daylight, is an excellent reason for suspecting that he may be fooled again."

"I cannot believe it."

"At all events, it will do no harm to take extra precautions, and, with your consent I shall quarter in the house to-night."

"You have my consent, with pleasure," replied the chief, "but you had better get Captain Dillon's consent."

"No," objected the detective, "if it makes no difference to you, I should prefer not to let Captain Dillon know anything about the scheme."

"Why is that?"

"Too many cooks sometimes spoil the broth, you know. I can manage this affair better alone."

The chief reflected.

He did not like to give up his point, and still he did not want to appear stubborn.

"You may require his assistance," he further urged.

"If I do," retorted Thad promptly, "it will be easy to call upon him. Besides, as I managed the treasure affair against large odds, all alone, I guess I can manage this."

Granger had spent the last of his ammunition, and surrendered gracefully.

"Go on," he said, laughing, "you will have your own way, anyhow, so I have no more to say."

Along about eight o'clock in the evening, Thad returned to the house in Forest avenue.

After looking about for some time, and finding a spot unoccupied by any of the uncanny animals—he did not choose the snake-side—he placed a screen about a divan in such a way that when he occupied the divan he could not be seen at once by any one entering the room.

He then threw himself upon the divan, there in the darkness, and awaited results.

It soon proved to be a lonesome watch.

The place was deathly quiet, except for the occasional whine or screech of some of the animals, which rendered it more dismal than ever.

The night dragged on slowly and drearily, so much so that the detective thought he had never experienced anything like it before.

There was a church not far away, and Thad heard the dreary hours clanged from its belfry.

At length he heard midnight ring out.

Still there was no sound of any one approaching.

Another long wait, and then one o'clock rung.

Thad had had no sleep the previous night, it will be remembered, and he now found himself growing drowsy.

He struggled against it manfully, and even got up two or three times and took

a turn about the room to arouse himself.

But the moment he would resume his seat the sense of stupor would come over him.

Knowing how readily he awoke with the slightest noise, he at length concluded to hazard a nap.

But once he surrendered to the drowsy god, he was completely in his power.

How long he slept he had no means of knowing, although he could not imagine the time to exceed a few minutes.

But when he awoke it was with a sudden start, and to find a brilliant light shining in his face, and behind the light the figure of a man.

Not only one man, but when the detective got his eyes wide enough open to take in the situation, he discovered that there were several men.

The one holding the light—which was a lantern with a powerful lens, he recognized at a glance as the man whom he had run against in the sub-station, and therefore concluded must be Francis Percival.

Indeed, it was impossible that it could be anybody else in this place, especially when the detective came to contrast him with his companions, who were a lot of the most vicious looking wretches he had ever beheld.

A glance at the circle of vicious faces was sufficient to tell the detective that they were made up of members of the "Twisters," and, indeed, he was not long in recognizing the villainous "mug" of Duggan himself.

"This is his gratitude," mused Thad, as the recognition flashed upon him, "Last night I saved his life, and to-night he is ready to take mine in return."

All this had flashed through his mind in the space of a few seconds.

Thad had straightened himself up and got upon his feet, instinctively grasping his revolver.

But when he saw the cold muzzles of half a dozen weapons pushed into his face, and heard the stentorian command:

"Throw up your hands!"

He recognized the futility of attempting to defend himself at that moment, and dropped his revolver.

Then the man with the lantern spoke.

"Well, sir, what are you doing here?" he demanded sternly.

It was a perfectly natural question, and yet it seemed extremely absurd under the circumstances, so much so, that the detective laughed.

"Well, to tell you the truth," he said, "I am doing nothing at present. Although I am inclined to think that I have been taking a nap."

"Enough of your nonsense!" roared the little man. "What did you come up here for, and how did you get in?"

"To answer your last question first, I came in, like any gentleman, through the door, or by way of the door, rather, lest you should imagine I crawled through the keyhole. As for your other question, I came up here for the purpose of trapping and capturing a man by the name of Francis Percival."

"Francis Percival?" the fellow roared, and winked at his companions, who joined in the merry chorus. "That is good!" he cried, "exceedingly good! Why, my good fellow, are you aware that you are addressing the very individual you have mentioned?"

"Perfectly," replied Thad coolly.

"And you dare to tell me to my face that you came here for the purpose of capturing me?" fumed the little man savagely.

"Why not?" smiled Thad.

"Do you not realize that you are in my power, and that I have but to say the word, when you would be killed, tortured, or whatever I chose?"

"Oh, yes, I am aware of all this."

"And you are not afraid to address me thus?"

"Not in the least."

The little man's rage got the better of him at this point, and his tongue appeared to be tied.

He could only glare at the detective and grind his teeth.

Burr still smiled derisively, and continued: "Why should I tremble at a contemptible

coward and murderer? If you were the tenth part of a man I would crush you! But as it is, I would hesitate to soil my hands with you!"

This speech had the effect of working the little man's fury up to such a pitch that he could not contain himself any longer.

He snatched a dagger from his bosom, he threw himself at the detective, evidently intending to bury the blade in his breast.

But he had misjudged the man he was attacking.

Quicker than a flash Thad's fist shot out, struck the villain between the eyes and sent him sprawling to the floor.

But the little man was not rendered unconscious, and as he fell, he called out:

"Upon him, men! Down him! Make him fast!"

Instantly the whole pack was upon him.

There must have been about fifteen of them, the most powerful and the most daring among the gang of "Twisters."

For some minutes, nevertheless, the detective kept them at bay, and more than one of them went down not to rise again in a hurry.

But they fought like fiends.

Evidently they had been prepared for the fray with liberal potations of the villainous decoction kept at the "Growler."

At all events, Thad had never seen them exhibit such temerity as they did now.

He would no more than knock one of them down, when, in many cases, he would rise and come at him again.

But this could not go on forever.

Thad's power of endurance had its limits, and, after a stubborn fight of several minutes' duration, he was finally overpowered.

The outlaws then bound him hand and foot and carried him across the hall into the other suite of compartments and threw him on the floor, where he had a number of uncanny reptiles as companions and bed-fellows.

The outlaws then repaired to another compartment, where they sat down about a table covered with bottles and glasses and proceeded to enjoy themselves.

CHAPTER XXII.

AN UNCANNY ORGIE.

As the night wore on and the liquor continued to circulate, the wretches at the table grew noisy, and from noisy to boisterous.

Indeed, they created such a din with their loud talking, singing and swearing, that Thad wondered that the police on guard below did not hear them.

And then he remembered what the servants had told him about the noise made by the violent lunatics on this floor, and he now understood the meaning of it.

It had doubtless been these same revelers they had heard.

This led him to conclude that Jules Revere must have been cognizant of what was going on, and his pretense that the upper floor was devoted to the use of violent patients was for the purpose of shielding these rascals.

But what the detective could not yet understand was how they managed to get into and out of the house without the knowledge of the police who were guarding it.

That there was a secret passage, there could be no doubt.

And Thad determined to find it, if he ever escaped from his bondage.

Meanwhile, the revelers continued to drink, and to grow momentarily more boisterous.

At length they began to dance.

There was a piano in the room, and one of the ruffians could play a few popular airs by ear, and he sat down to the piano and hammered out such airs as came into his befogged brain, while several of the outlaws, who were still sober enough to stand upon their legs, engaged in a wild, half-savage dance.

Reeling as they went, they would frequently crash up against vases and stands of rare china, bringing them to the floor in a shattered mass.

At length one or two of the most reckless began picking up the serpents, twining them about their necks like garlands, and continuing the horrible dance; and one even twined a number of scorpions about his head

for a crown, giving him the appearance of a real imp of Hades.

Altogether, it was one of the most weird and uncanny orgies the detective had ever dreamed of, much less saw.

He was filled with loathing and disgust, and yet he hoped that some good might grow out of it, in the fact of the participants growing so drunk as to become helpless, when he would stand a chance of making his escape.

Unfortunately, he noticed that Percival drank very little, and when his companions were in a hilarious state, he was still sober.

As morning approached the revelers began to subside, having worn themselves out, and one by one dropped about the floor in a dead stupor, some of them with the serpents still entwined about them.

At length the last one had ceased to make a noise, and sat or lay asleep, and the place had grown deathly still.

This was continued for some moments, and Thad was wondering whether Percival had also gone to sleep, when that gentleman walked into the room where he lay, or sat, rather, for he had raised himself to a sitting posture.

The little man stared at the detective for a moment, and then asked:

"Well, how did you enjoy the festival?"

"First-class," replied Thad cheerfully.

"Did you ever see anything like it before?"

"Oh, yes, I am used to that sort of thing," replied Burr carelessly.

"It didn't give you the shivers, then?"

"Certainly not."

"By Jove!" ejaculated the little man, "you must have nerves of steel!"

"Pretty near, I guess," laughed Thad. "By the way, what are you going to do with me?"

Percival hesitated a moment, and then answered:

"That depends."

"Upon what?"

"Well, upon yourself largely."

"Explain," said Thad curiously.

Again Percival was silent, but finally resumed:

"You and I have been playing a desperate game for the past two or three weeks. For the most part you have been the winner."

He paused, and Thad said:

"Well?"

"You have beaten me in the matter of the treasure, you have beaten me—and my wife—in getting her behind the bars, and I now give you credit for having been the first detective to accomplish this. You have also beaten us in the recovery of the diamonds, and got my friend and ally behind the bars."

"You refer to Ned Grogan?" interposed the detective.

"No, I refer to Jules Revere, the best and most useful friend I ever had, although Ned was also a faithful fellow."

"Well?" interjected Thad.

"All this you have accomplished," pursued the little man, "and in doing it, you have ruined my prospects. In return, I have won this much. I have got you in my power."

"You have got me in your power," repeated Thad. "And now what do you propose to do?"

"As I said, that depends entirely upon yourself. 'If you wish, you can go free.'"

"Thanks," smiled the detective, "that is what I wish above all things."

"But you must first comply with my demands," interposed the little man.

"Yes?"

"Yes."

"What do you require of me?"

"Listen. As I said, you have regained possession of the wealth. In doing so, you have put it out of my power to escape. It will only be a matter of time when I will be arrested. With the gold I could have escaped with my wife, gone to some place where I was not known, settled down and led an honest life."

Thad laughed.

"Lead an honest life upon stolen money?" he questioned.

"Why not? That is what all the millionaires do. They steal a few millions and then settle down and become ornaments to society. Why not?"

"It is rather late to think of that, now that the treasure has been recovered."

"No, it is not," declared Percival, "and that is just what I want to speak to you about."

Thad listened eagerly.

"The gold, to be sure, is in the hands of the relatives of Langford," resumed the little man. "But that is not saying that it is beyond recovery. They start for San Francisco on the early train this morning. They are going to take the chest of gold with them. Now, here is my plan:

"They know you, and will have great confidence in what you say. Go then, just as they are about to have the chest loaded on the car, and tell them that there is a plot on foot to rob the train between here and Kansas City, as the robbers knew about the gold."

"Then tell them that you will take charge of the chest, and bring it on a late train, and that they can stop over in Kansas City and take charge of it the rest of the way."

"Well?" interjected Thad.

"Well, don't you catch on?"

"Can't say that I do."

"Why, you greeny, the idea is, that instead of coming on with the boodle, you'll turn it over to me, or, what would be more natural and business-like, allow me to prig it."

"That would be a great scheme," mused the detective.

"Does it go?" demanded the other.

"What do I get out of it?" ventured Thad.

"Why, say—fifty thousand, and your liberty. Ain't that enough?"

"Oh, I get my liberty, do I?"

"Certainly."

"And if I do not go into the plot?"

"You'll never get your liberty in the world."

"What then?" inquired Thad flippantly.

"You will be subjected to the most horrible torture, and finally killed."

"And the only escape from all this is through the plan you have just mentioned?"

"Yes."

"Then I shall have to endure the torture and killing," said Thad firmly, "for I will never commit a dishonorable act. I never have, and I will die rather than do it."

"Very well," said the little man, rising.

"Remember, you will die the most horrible death that human ingenuity can devise."

"So be it," answered Burr.

"You had better consider the matter seriously before deciding finally."

"You have had my final decision," uttered the detective decisively.

Without another word the little man walked away and left him.

An hour or more passed, and Thad heard no more of him, and all this time he was wondering when the torturing would begin, and what it would consist of.

At length he became conscious of a strange odor in the room.

It was unlike anything he had ever smelt, and at the same time he became aware that some unseen agency was producing a strange sensation in him.

It was not unlike the first ecstatic exhilaration produced by a glass of wine or spirits, but of a thousand times more pleasing and delightful a nature.

At the same time he noticed that all the reptiles were becoming suddenly animated.

Those which had appeared downcast, suddenly began to squirm about and exhibit unmistakable signs of spirit.

One little scorpion which had been peacefully reposing on top of a perch all this time, began to frisk about and go through a series of wild evolutions, which would have led one to conclude that he had been at the bottles in the other room.

While Thad was watching all these phenomena and wondering at them, there was something going on close to him that was of far more vital interest to him, if he had known it, but he did not, until he was brought to a realization of it by a sudden grip of one of his legs.

Then he looked down to behold a great boa which had lain peacefully coiled up in a corner all evening, and which was about ten feet long, slowly coiling itself about his leg.

In a few moments it would reach his body,

and then it would only be a matter of time when he would be squeezed into a mere pulp by the powerful reptile.

Thad never realized his utter helplessness so thoroughly as now.

This, then, was to be the mode of his death.

It was too horrible to contemplate, and he shut his eyes rather than watch the hideous thing twist its coils about him.

Slowly the reptile coiled higher and higher, and each successive minute was as a grain of sand in the hastening hour-glass of his life.

He realized that he had but a few more minutes to live, and in that supreme moment of agony, Thad did what he never did before—he wished, devoutly wished that he had accepted the scoundrel's proposition.

It was a terrible moment, and had completely unmanned him.

He had faced death in various forms more than a hundred times, but nothing that he had ever experienced compared with this for horror.

In his agony—which so far was only mental—he cried out, unconsciously, but the cry was so full of pain and agony that the echo of his own voice startled him.

There was no response, save the echoes of his voice as they reverberated through the rooms.

What had become of Percival? he wondered.

Pretty soon there was a sound of foot steps, and Thad strained his eyes in the direction.

If it should be Percival, the chances are the great detective will weaken and accept his proposition.

The footsteps came nearer, and at length a figure bursts through the *portieres*.

It is that of Duggan.

He staggers about and leers at the detective on the floor for a moment, and finally the situation dawns upon his muddled brain.

"Youse saved my life," he muttered in a thick voice, "s'elp me, I'll save youn, see?"

CHAPTER XXIII.

A NARROW ESCAPE.

DRUNK as he was, the ruffian knew enough to realize that the detective was in imminent danger of his life from the deadly serpent, but he was utterly helpless to assist him, for the reason that he did not know how to go about releasing him.

But Thad was equal to the occasion.

"Have you any chewing tobacco?" he asked of the outlaw.

"Yep," replied the other, searching his pocket as he staggered about.

"Very well, give me a chew, and you take a mouthful yourself. Then, when you have a mouthful of the saliva, spurt it into the serpent's mouth."

This was easily accomplished, as the snake was hungry and kept opening its mouth every moment.

Duggan did as he was advised, and pretty soon the two men were spurring alternate mouthfuls into the mammoth jaws of the reptile.

It did not take long to render the creature harmless. In a few seconds the nicotine took effect, and the great monster gradually uncoiled itself, and fell limp and dormant upon the floor.

"So much for youse, yer son of a gun!" hiccoughed Duggan. "Dat's w'ot ye git fer chawin' terbacker."

"Never mind the snake!" cried Thad impatiently. "Cut these infernal cords off my feet and wrists."

The outlaw staggered about, got out his knife, and at length succeeded in cutting the cords which bound his feet.

"Now be careful," admonished Thad, as the fellow went about severing the cords on his wrists with a very shaky hand. "Be careful that you don't cut me."

"Don't cher be 'larmed, cap'n," stammered Duggan. "I wouldn't cut yer fer a farm. See?"

"Well, see that you do not."

As soon as his bonds were severed and he got upon his feet, the detective asked:

"Where is Percival?"

"Who?" inquired the lieutenant.

"Percival," repeated Thad.

"D'yer mean His Whiskers?"

"Yes, that is the chap."

"I dunno."

"Is he not about the house?"

"I reckon not," grunted Duggan. "Leastwise he said he was a-goin' ter skip de town dis mornin'."

"Is that true?"

"Dat's right, cap'n. If he hadn't been gone, yer wouldn't never 'a' seen me a-comin' in dere to 'lease yer, see?"

"You are sure he has gone?" questioned the detective, earnestly.

"I dunno, only w'ot His Whiskers said. He said he was a-goin' ter skip de burg."

"Where does he expect to go?"

"Ter Canada, I reckon."

"Whom does all this furniture belong to?" asked Thad, looking about at the sumptuously furnished apartments.

"It belongs ter de dame, I reckon," answered Duggan.

"And she is locked up. Did he say anything about her—about being sorry to leave her—or anything like that, before he went?"

"Nope."

"Didn't express any regret at all?"

"Not dat I heered."

"Which goes to show that he hasn't gone. It is only a blind."

"I don't t'ink," growled Duggan. "Ye see de dame kin take keer of herself, and he knows dat, and he ain't a-goin' ter worry 'bout her."

"How long have you known this man, Duggan?"

"His Whiskers?"

"Yes."

"Oh, 'bout two year."

"Has he had this place all that time?"

"Nope, he only jes' comed in heer 'bout two weeks, or mebbe it's three weeks, ago."

"Did Revere occupy the lower floors then?"

"I dunno, somebody did."

"Did you not know that the lower part of the house was a lunatic asylum?"

"Hully chee! Is dat so?" exclaimed the ruffian, opening his eyes very wide.

"Yes, had you never heard of it?"

"Nixey."

"You did not come in through the front door, then?"

"Nope, I reckon not."

"How did you get in?"

"Trough de cellar, like rats."

"Will you show me the way?"

"Shure."

Thad reflected for some moments, and then said:

"Now tell me, Duggan, what did you fellows come up here last night for? You had some object in coming?"

"Yep, we had a object," returned the outlaw. "Yer see it was jes' like dis: His Whiskers was purty well done up. Youse had got de swag, and runned in his right-bower, big Ned, and he hadn't nuthin' ter fall back on but de Twisters. Wal, he got wind dat youse was comin' up heer ter lay fer 'im, so he comes over to de 'Growler' and gits de gang to come up. He said he didn't have no dough ter give out, but dat we could do youse dead easy, and den he'd give us all de lush we could drink w'en de job was done."

"And you consented to take part in this thing after what I did for you the night before?"

"Oh, I wouldn't 'a' come, only I t'ought dere might be some chance o' helpin' youse out o' de hole," protested Duggan.

"Is that honest?"

"Dat's hones'."

"Well, I'll believe you, for the reason that you did help me out. But about the furniture and other articles up here, was not Percival afraid to go away and leave this crowd of prigs in here?"

"I dunno, sir," answered Duggan innocently.

"Come, old fellow, that won't do. You need not tell me that a man of Percival's intelligence would do a thing of that kind. Now you know, and I know, that he has no more gone than I have. These fellows have been left up here to help him out, in case he should need help. As for me, he took it for granted that the snake would take care of me. Just you get those fellows out of here,

and I will allow you to go about your business, otherwise I shall have to run you in too."

Then considering that he had spoken rather harshly to the man who had come to his rescue at the very point of death, he said:

"I say, old fellow, get the chaps out of here, and then you remain here with me. I know you have no particular love for Percival, and I will pay you well for helping me."

"It's a go," cried the ruffian enthusiastically. "I'll get de beggars out an' den stay wid youse, and if dat measly Whiskers comes back, we'll nail 'im. Eh, cap'n?"

"That is what we shall do."

Duggan staggered away, and pretty soon there was a fearful wrangle in progress.

The half-stupefied men did not relish the idea of being disturbed before they had finished their nap, and protested vigorously against it.

Nevertheless, Duggan, by dint of persistence and threats of the police, finally got them on the move, and at length down the secret stairway leading to the basement.

When they were all out, Duggan locked the door and returned to Thad.

"Now, Duggan," began the detective, sit down. "I want to talk to you."

The outlaw complied, and Thad continued:

"You have been in this man's employ more or less ever since he came here, two years ago, have you not?"

"Somew'ot," grunted the outlaw.

"You have helped him in most of his dirty jobs?"

"I reckon dat is w'ot youse'd call 'em," grinned Duggan. "Though for de las' six months, since he's had de big chap he's kinder give us de dirty shake."

"At all events, you have been pretty well acquainted with his movements."

"So, so."

"You helped him in the trunk job, of course?"

"Nope, we didn't git a smell at dat. Him an' big Ned done it all, 'cept w'en we went out to git de swag in de swamp."

Thad thought a moment, and then came out boldly with:

"What do you know about a child which is mixed up in the case?"

The outlaw started, and exhibited more genuine agitation than Thad could have believed it possible.

"Hully chee!" he exclaimed. "Youse ain't got onter dat, too, has yer?"

"Certainly," replied Thad as coolly as if he knew all about it.

"Wal, youse a keen one!" cried the outlaw, with an expression of astonishment. "I didn't t'ink nobody was onter dat."

"Oh, I manage to keep posted in matters of this kind. But what did they finally do with it? I know the intention was to put it out of the way, but I lost track of it while tracing this other case."

"Oh, dey didn't do away wid it, arter all," answered Duggan slowly. "Yer see, dat was left to de big feller, and he was too chicken-hearted to kill a kid, so he took it out to some Irish friends o' his'n on de north side an' left it dere."

"Do you know the address of these people with whom he left it?"

"Nope, but I reckon Ned'd tell yer, now dat ye've got 'im in de cooler."

"Do you think he would?"

"I'm 'most sure on it."

"Who did the child belong to?"

"I dunno deir names—some rich folks dough."

"What was the object in putting it out of the way?"

"W'y, yer see it wasn't de real kid o' de folks; dey was jes' bringin' it up, and it was ter come inter a lot o' prop'ty w'en it growed up, so dey got de will fixed over to dem somehow, and den got de dame to put de kid out o' de way."

"You mean Winnifred Rayburn?"

"Yep, His Whiskers's wife."

"And she, in turn, put it into the hands of big Ned?"

"Yep."

"Expecting that he would kill the child, eh?"

"Yep, and de great booby was too chicken-hearted to do it."

"If it had been you, you would not have hesitated, eh?"

"Bet yer life, I wouldn't. I'd 'a' choked it too quick."

Thad could hardly restrain himself from using the same operation, but concluded not to do so, and went on:

"Was there any reward offered for the child when it disappeared?"

"It didn't disappear, see?" laughed the outlaw. "Dat is, so far as anybody knowed. It was s'posed ter be sent away to be edycated."

Thad remained in the apartment until after daylight, and then leaving Duggan, whom he believed he could trust, in charge, left the place, and, after procuring breakfast, called at the jail and had a talk with Grogan.

The big Irishman was not inclined to talk at first, but after a good deal of coaxing, he at length gave the address of the people with whom he had left the child, together with all the particulars he was in possession of.

Thad next called upon the people who were into possession of the child, and found them to be respectable people.

He informed them how the child had come in the possession of Ned, and of its prospects, and then laid the facts before the police.

The people who had contracted to have the child put out of the way stood high in society, and when the scandal came out it caused a great sensation.

"What else are you going to find in connection with this case, Mr. Burr?" inquired Chief Granger, laughing.

"There is no telling," replied Thad. "By the way, I haven't got my man yet, although the prospects look pretty fair just now."

He then related the account of the orgies of the night before, which caused the chief to open his eyes.

"And this under the very nose of Captain Dillon?" he growled. "I shall have to investigate this matter."

"I am doing it for you, chief," laughed the detective.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE UNEXPECTED.

As soon as Thad was through with his business on the outside, he hastened back to the Revere mansion.

"You seem to find something to interest you up there, detective," observed Captain Dillon, as Thad was about to ascend the stairs.

"So I do," rejoined Burr, lightly.

"What is it?" demanded the official peremptorily.

"Oh, there is so much that I have not time to detail it all. For one thing, I suppose you know that I captured the woman up there?"

"Yes, I heard about that," snarled the captain. "She must have gone up there before we came on here."

"On the contrary, she went up there yesterday—in fact while I was there."

"You don't mean to say that she got into the house without my knowledge?" growled the official incredulously.

"I do, and not only she, but the man we are after and fifteen of his pals."

"This is absurd!" roared the captain.

"I do not blame you for thinking so, captain," answered Thad, without losing his temper. "The fact is, they have a way of getting up there that I only discovered last night."

Even then he left the captain extremely skeptical on the point.

When he returned up-stairs, Thad found that Duggan had been faithful to his charge, and complimented him on his loyalty.

"Oh, yer'll find old Bloody Duggan true, w'en he finds a friend," returned the outlaw. "It's so seldom dat one finds a gent o' your nerve dat's white, dat a cove like me likes ter stick to 'im."

"You had better go out and get something to eat," suggested Burr. "You must be hungry by this time."

Duggan pointed in the direction of the table, which, besides liquors, contained a lot of cold meats, bread, butter and other articles of food.

"I doesn't git hungry—much," he said, "wile dem t'ings is dere."

"But you should have something warm," suggested the detective.

"Wot's de matter wid de tanglefoot?" said the outlaw. "Isn't dat warm enough?"

"You're a faithful fellow, Duggan," commented Burr, warmly. "Why don't you become an honest man?"

The outlaw looked at him in surprise.

"Me?" he grunted.

"Yes. Why not?"

Duggan shook his head.

"It ain't no use, sir," he growled. "Yer kin wash de dirt outen a shirt, but ye cain't wash de holes out. I'm bad all de way t'rough like a rotten pertater, an' de deeper yer goes, de rottener ye finds me. No, it ain't no use."

"But you could reform."

"No use. I tried it onc't. Dem Salvation Army fellers got hold on me an' I t'ought it was a good t'ing, and tried it fer a week, and say—I was sick for a month arterwards. Ye see it don't 'gree wid me constitution, and if I hadn't went right off an' stole a watch w'en I did, I'd 'a' died. Dat's right."

Burr saw that it was no use of trying to reform him, and changed the subject.

"You have seen nothing of Percival, I presume?" he said.

"Nope," was the response. "Dere ain't been nobody up heer, 'cept me an' de snakes, and if I hit dat bottle many more times de number o' snakes 'll increase."

"You'd better let the bottle alone then," suggested Thad.

"Oh, I dunno 'bout dat," chuckled the outlaw. "I'm kinder fond o' de critters. Like me old dad. Ye see he was blind, and he use ter git stavin' so dat he could see snakes, 'cause he said dat was de only t'ing he ever could see."

Thad put in the time as best he could for the rest of the day, and at six o'clock went out for his dinner.

He tried to persuade Duggan to do the same, but the outlaw declined, insisting that "de free lunch an' de tanglefoot," were good enough for him.

After he had his dinner the detective returned and resumed his vigil.

"I wonder if that fellow will return to-night," he said.

"Dat depends," returned Duggan. "If he ain't skipped 'cross de border, de chances is he'll show up; if he has skipped 'cross de border, ye'd better put up all yer dust on 'im not showin' up."

"Now, let us settle upon a plan of operations," interposed Burr. "Which way does he come in?"

"On t'other side."

"Very well; I will remain in here, and conceal myself, and when he comes, you meet him and get him engaged in conversation, when I will come out and get the drop on him."

"Dat's de plan," declared Duggan, enthusiastically. "But yer don't reckon he'll be alone, do yer?"

"Why not?"

"He's 'most sure ter go to der 'Growler,' and if he does, he'll not only find out dat youse is released, but he'll find de gang dere, and he's 'most sure ter engage dem to come wid 'im."

"Do you imagine that those drunken fellows noticed that I had been released?"

"I'm sure dat some on 'em did, 'cause dey spoke 'bout it, and wanted ter know how it happened."

"What answer did you give them?"

"I tried to stuff dem wid de notion dat dey was mistaken, and w'en I found dat wouldn't work, I give dem guff like dis: I said yer jis' twisted loose, and dey said youse orter b'long to der Twisters."

"So you think there is no doubt about them knowing that I was out of my bonds?"

"Dey ain't de least doubt 'bout it," affirmed the outlaw.

"Then Percival will come prepared for me."

"Dey ain't no doubts 'bout dat."

Hour after hour went by, and midnight had just finished chiming on the various neighboring bells.

Duggan had just returned from a tour of inspection, and hastened up to the closet where the detective had concealed himself.

"Dey're heer!" he whispered, "and dere's a hull crowd on 'em. Lay low."

A moment later Percival, followed by Docky Pete and a dozen of his men strode in to the room.

Percival glanced about suspiciously, scowled darkly, and demanded:

"Where is that detective, Blood?"

"S'elp me, boss, I dunno," replied the outlaw earnestly.

"Don't lie to me, you villain!" shouted the little man. "I say he is here, and the quicker you produce him, the better it will be for you, for if we have to hunt him up and find him, it will go hard with you!"

It was a critical moment for poor Duggan, and Thad listened intently to see if he would weaken.

But he did not.

"I tell yer he ain't heer," stubbornly persisted he. "If yer don't b'lieve me, look."

It was evident he relied upon Thad to take care of himself in the event of their instituting a search.

He had provided the detective with arms, and he knew from past experience that he could use a revolver to some purpose when occasion required.

"Well, we shall see!" shouted Percival in a boisterous tone. "Stand aside, sir!"

And he took hold of the outlaw to throw him aside, when to his utter astonishment, Duggan grasped the little man by the shoulders and slung him half way across the room.

So astonished was Percival at this exhibition of impertinence on the part of a man who had always cringed obedience, that it was several minutes before he could recover his breath enough to speak.

But at length he roared:

"Down with him, men! He's a traitor, as I expected. Down with him!"

At the command half a dozen of the ruffians made a dash at Duggan.

But he managed to defend himself for a minute or two, and felled two or three of them.

And then the rest of the gang rushed upon the poor fellow, and he would have stood a poor show, had not timely assistance arrived.

Just as they were coming the thickest, Thad sprung out of the closet, and his powerful fist began to lay them out in rapid succession.

Percival, who recognized how matters were going, yelled:

"Don't waste time with him, men! Draw your guns and let him have it!"

At the same time drawing his own revolver, he leveled it at Thad and fired.

But his aim was not good or his hand unsteady, for the bullet went wide of the mark.

Thad saw that he, too, must resort to radical measures, and drew his two revolvers.

An instant later two reports rung out, and two men dropped.

One was Francis Percival and the other Docky Pete.

This had the effect of creating a panic among the outlaws, who began to retreat in great disorder.

In their flight they did not neglect to pick up the two wounded men and carry them off, however.

"Follow them up, Duggan!" cried Thad.

"They cannot get down the stairs with the wounded man before we capture him. We must capture him!"

With that the two men dashed toward the secret stairway.

Those in the lead had carried the wounded men through the door leading to the stairway, while the rest had massed themselves outside with the evident determination of disputing the passage with some spirit.

Thad did not hesitate an instant, on this account, however.

Leveling his revolver at the crowd, he fired, wounding one or two and striking terror to the rest.

In a moment the crowd was struggling to get through the narrow door.

Taking advantage of this condition of affairs, the detective determined to push through and recover the prisoner.

He had nearly succeeded, when there was a sudden change in the aspect of affairs.

The crowd began to surge out of the door again.

What could it mean?

Had they suddenly recovered their courage?

But they appeared to pay no attention to the detective.

Something within was causing the stampede.

Then there came a shrill voice from within the casement.

It appeared to be that of a woman, but it couldn't be that.

His ears certainly deceived him.

The panic must be the result of the police, who had found entrance by the secret stairway.

But now the shrill voice comes again, louder and shriller than before:

"Back, cowards! What are you running from? Stand your ground, if you are shot down to a man!"

Then the crowd paused and a figure pushed through and stood before Thad.

It was that of a woman.

It was Winnifred Rayburn!

"Once more, sir!" she uttered, placing herself defiantly before him. "You thought you had me secure; but you see that you were mistaken!"

CHAPTER XXV.

DEFEAT AND FLIGHT.

NOTHING could have caused the detective greater surprise than did the sight of Winnifred Rayburn in this place.

How had she escaped jail?

Then he thought of her boast that the chief would not dare to hold her.

Could there be any truth in this?

But he had something else to think of just now.

How the woman came to be here was not of so great importance as the fact that she was here, for her appearance had inspired the panicked outlaws with fresh courage, and they seemed determined upon victory.

Only a second had elapsed.

Thad cast a hasty and contemptuous glance at the woman, and said:

"Yes, I see you are here again; but it will do you no good. It is only a matter of time when I will have you behind the bars, where you belong."

"Not with all the forces you can muster," she uttered vehemently, "and not until all of these men have spent their last drop of blood!"

"Come! this is all idle talk. You may as well come now as later, for I will take you some time."

At that moment his voice was drowned by a deafening yell from the men, who were pressing forward, anxious to fight.

One burly fellow threw himself in between the detective and the woman and growled:

"We'll settle this dispute right here: what's wantin', say?"

By way of response Thad gave him a right-hander at the butt of the ear which sent him reeling to the floor.

But this only had the effect of opening the ball, so to speak.

The ruffians were just waiting for some one to strike the first blow.

It had been struck, and their blood was up.

With one accord they rushed upon the detective, pell-mell.

But it availed them nothing.

His mighty arm shot out with the rapidity of lightning, and the destructiveness of a catapult, and whatever came in its way had to yield.

The ruffians were being piled up in a shapeless heap on the floor, and they soon saw that the contest was a failure as thus carried on.

The woman was the first to realize this.

She had taken her station at a little distance away, and when she saw how matters stood, she suddenly grew frantic, and cried:

"Don't waste time on him. Use your weapons!"

It must not be thought that Duggan had been idle all this time.

He had been doing his part, and many a bloody nose and discolored eye was the result.

And now when the woman admonished her men to draw their revolvers, he was the first to respond, although on the opposite side.

And to the woman's surprise and terror, he pointed his pistol straight at her.

"Better kill de queen-bee first," he growled. "W'en she's outen de way, dere won't be no sand left in t'others."

And it is likely that he would have carried out his purpose, but at that instant the sharp report of a pistol rung out in another part of the room, and poor Duggan threw up his hands, uttered a shriek of pain and fell to the floor.

This left Thad to fight the battle alone, and he was not slow to grasp the desperate nature of the situation.

But he was determined, and was never more self-possessed in his life.

One by one the ruffians had drawn their weapons, in response to the woman's demand, and the bullets had begun to whistle about the detective's head with unpleasant rapidity.

There was no escape through retreat, and he could not think of that now, so he backed himself up against the nearest wall and began pouring a fusillade into the ranks of the ruffians.

A few shots, every one of which did good service, began to cause the outlaws to waver again and exhibit unmistakable signs of panic.

But Winnifred never for an instant lost courage or presence of mind.

Frantically she urged on the men, calling them cowards and applying other contemptible epithets for running from one man.

But it was no use. The men were thoroughly demoralized, and, after a brief struggle began trying to get through the door.

This threw the woman into a perfect frenzy.

"Cowardly dogs!" she hissed. "I've a notion to turn upon you myself."

But instead of doing so, she pointed her pistol at the detective and fired.

It was the first effective shot fired by any of the gang.

It struck Thad over the heart, and, while the bullet did not fatal injury, it having been turned from its course by a package in his breast-pocket, the concussion was such as to produce dizziness and nausea, so that for a moment he grew blind, reeled, and would have fallen had he not steadied himself by the wall.

It soon passed, and he was himself once more, but it was too late.

When he recovered and looked about him, the crowd of ruffians and the woman had disappeared.

He hastened to the stairway and looked down.

Only darkness and silence were there.

He realized then that the fight had been kept up at the instigation of Winnifred, for the purpose of giving those who were carrying her wounded husband time to make their escape.

Thinking it possible that he might yet be in time to head off the last part of the contingent, including the woman, he hastened down stairs and into the basement, but all was quiet there, and a search, which he instituted, failing to reveal the existence of the secret stairway in that locality, he concluded that Duggan had not informed him correctly in regard to it.

Thad thought it possible that the woman might still be in hiding somewhere in the apartments up-stairs, so he returned to them and made a diligent search.

But all to no purpose; she had made her escape.

He then turned his attention to poor Duggan, who still lay unconscious on the floor.

Upon examination it was found that, although painful, his wound was not fatal, and the application of a little brandy brought the outlaw to his senses.

Thad soon stanching the blood with some raw cotton he found in the place, and dressed the wound as skillfully as any surgeon could have done it.

Duggan was soon in prime condition and as talkative as a parrot.

"Dat was a hot scrimmage, cap'n," he said. "But, say, I orter let de dame have it cold de first t'ing, widout no chinnin'. Dat's wot allus downs me—chinnin'. Instead o' goin' right on an' doin' a t'ing, I allus has ter stop to chin, an' den some udder bloke gits in his fluke first. 'Tain't

right, it's dead wrong. In footer, I shoots first and chins arterwards."

"That will be the better plan," coincided Thad.

"Youse jes' bet. Yer see, if I'd a' plugged de dame, de fight 'u'd a' been ourn right off. But say, did dey all git erway?"

"Yes, the whole lot of them," sighed Thad.

"Yer didn't plug ter kill, den?"

"No, I didn't wish to kill any of them. That is always repugnant to me. My only object was to disable enough of them to put them in our power, but it seems even the wounded—and I know there were a good many—got away."

"Say, cap'n, didn't youse ever kill nobody?" questioned the outlaw, helping himself to another drink out of one of the bottles.

"No, I can conscientiously say that I never, in all my tempestuous career as a detective, killed a man, although I have wounded a good many in self defense."

"Oh, but yer orter kill one," chuckled the outlaw. "Dere's a kinder of a feelin' 'bout dat, dat yer don't git no udder way. Yer kinder feel as if ye'd pulled de earth from under yerself, and den yer kinder wanten git round a corner and hide from yerself, 'less yer'll be doin' yerself some mischief. Say, it's great! But de sensation's w'en yestick a cove wid a knife. Yer feels de blade strike de yieldin' flesh an' kinder tremble, and den yer feel de warm blood spurt out on yer hand, and yert'ink it's runnin' to yer heart. I tell yer, it's great."

Thad gazed at the fellow in horrified amazement.

Was it possible that such creatures existed? he thought.

"No wonder they call you Bloody Duggan," he commented.

"Dat's right," grinned the outlaw proudly. "Dere ain't a man livin' w'ot's took more livings dan me, an' nobody w'ot kin do it wid more relish. Say, I dunno which I likes de best, killin' or whisky."

"Well, from the way you are punishing the whisky at present, I should say the latter."

"I dunno 'bout dat. Ye see a feller has his time fer everything. Dere's times w'en yer want ter sleep an' udder times w'en yer wants ter eat, and w'en yer wants ter sleep, yer don't wants ter eat. Jes' so heer. Jes' now, my appetite runs ter whisky."

"So it would seem. But come, we must make a move. Which way do you imagine those people have gone?"

"Wal, my 'pinion is dey'll meke a break for Canady, now dat de dame's wid 'em."

"How will they be likely to go?"

"I dunno, but Revere's got a yacht, an' dey may try dat way."

"That is the very scheme," cried Thad. "Well, you had better remain here, in the event that they should think of coming back, and I will go and see if I can get any trace of them."

Day was just breaking when the detective left the apartments, and he made his way at once to Police Headquarters.

There he found the department, from the chief down, in a terrible state of excitement over the escape of the woman.

"How did it happen?" inquired Thad.

"That is the puzzle," replied the chief. "The door was unlocked, so that she must have had assistance from the outside. But she has had no visitors."

"None at all?"

"None except a little old woman that belongs to the Salvation Army, who came in yesterday afternoon and tried to convert Miss Rayburn."

"Was this woman searched before being allowed to go to Miss Rayburn's cell?"

"Oh, no, the warden didn't think it worth while, she was such an innocent-looking old creature."

"No doubt, and yet, in my opinion it was the same innocent-looking old creature that carried the means of escape to Winnifred Rayburn."

CHAPTER XXVI.

ON THE SCENT.

DURING that day the town was scoured by the police for some trace of the escaped prisoner and the wounded man, her husband.

The fact of his being wounded gave the police great confidence in their ability to soon run the pair down.

Thad, in the mean time, was not idle.

He, too, sought in many directions, for the missing pair.

He paid a visit to big Ned and to Revere in prison, hoping to induce them to make some revelation which would serve as a clue, but they were both as non-committal as ever.

Inquiry along the lake front resulted in the discovery that no yacht had been seen to put off during the night, and, indeed, the craft belonging to Revere was found in its harbor, so that it was evident they had not escaped in that manner.

Finally Thad called at the "Growler," as a last resort.

Docky was there, and, although his wound was not of a dangerous character, it was sufficient to put that estimable gentleman in a very bad humor, and he was not inclined to talk at all when Thad first went in.

But after the detective had "blown off" the gang, as they say, and moreover, when he had given the boss to understand that he was liable to arrest for the part he had taken in the affair of the previous night, he at length became somewhat communicative.

"I want you to give me the straight of this, and no humbug, now, Docky," began the detective. "You are liable to arrest for your part in the business, but if you give me a straight story, you shall not be molested."

"I'll give yer de straight tip," growled the outlaw, "an' no foolin', see?"

"Now, you must know," resumed Thad, "what became of the wounded man after he was carried out of the house. It was impossible to conceal him or spirit him away, so that you should not know this."

"Nope," responded Docky, shaking his head, "I dunno w'ot 'came o' any on 'em. I wish I did. Dey had us open dere scraffin' wid youse, an' I got a bullet in me laig dat'll lay me up fer de nex' two mont's, an' w'ot did we git outen it? Nuthin', dat's right. Nuthin'."

"So you received nothing for your work, eh?"

"Not a hooter."

"That is pretty rough, and then get wounded in the bargain."

"Youse jes' bet it is," growled Docky.

"But you must have heard where they intended to go?" persisted Thad.

"Nope."

"They certainly had some plan."

"I dunno."

"You did not hear it discussed?"

"Nope."

"Is there not a place somewhere on La Salle street where the Percivals stop sometimes?"

Docky hesitated.

"W'ot's dere in dis, if I give it away?" he at length asked, cautiously.

"Well, to begin with," said Burr, "I have already promised immunity from arrest. That ought to be enough; but in addition to that, if you will furnish me any information which will lead to making the discoveries I desire, you shall be well paid."

Docky reflected some moments, and at length said:

"I reckon I kin trust youse. But mind, if anyt'ing sh'ud happen, ye'r not to gimme 'way ter His Whiskers or de dame."

"Certainly not," promised Thad solemnly.

"Dey have got a flat on La Salle street, dat dey runs into w'en hard pressed."

"They don't live there permanently?"

"Nope."

"It's just a dodge in?"

"Dat's it."

"How long have they had the place?"

"Oh, 'bout a month, I reckon."

"They took it about the time they stole the child, didn't they?"

Docky looked at him in surprise, but finally answered:

"Yep, 'bout dat time."

"What is the number?"

The outlaw hesitated a moment, and then bent over and whispered the number in the detective's ear.

"Thanks," said Thad. "Now, there is another matter I want to speak to you about."

"W'ot's dat?"

"You know the woman escaped last night?"

"Yep. I wouldn't 'a' been with 'er if she hadn't, 'less dey'd 'a' had me locked up."

"You know, then, how she made her escape?"

"Not I."

"Sure?"

"Dat's right."

"But you just said you went with her."

"Shure—but not till she showed up at de joint over dere on Forest avenoo."

"That is true, you went with him in the first place. Still, you must know something about how she escaped?"

"Wal, I know dis much, dat His Whiskers give 'er de key."

"Percival gave her the key?" exclaimed Thad in astonishment.

"Yep."

"Not in person?"

"Dat's right."

"But the warden says that the only person who came in to visit her during the day was an old woman who belongs to the Salvation Army."

The outlaw roared with laughter.

"Dat feller's a keen one, sir," he laughed.

"What do you mean?"

"It was Whiskers hisself."

"Impossible."

"Dat's right, jes' de same."

"Do you mean to say that Percival disguised himself as an old woman and took the key to his wife?"

"Dat's de racket."

"But the man has a full beard," objected the detective.

Docky laughed again.

"So have youse, w'en it's convenient to wear 'em," he smiled. "An' me too, sometimes."

"Then you mean to say that the Van Dyke beard which he wears on ordinary occasions, and which I have never seen him without, are not genuine?"

"No more dan de gray whiskers youse had on de night you cleaned out de crowd in de United States bar."

"I don't wonder, then, at your calling him a slick one."

"Slick? His match don't live, cap'n."

"I begin to think you are right."

With the information obtained from Docky in his possession, Thad first returned to the Revere mansion to ascertain how Duggan was getting along, and whether anything had been seen of the Percivals.

Duggan was still there, but none of the parties wanted had been there.

"I tink dey've 'parted for Canady," prophesied the outlaw.

"No, you are mistaken about that," returned the detective. "They are still in the city, in all probability, and I think I am on to their location."

"W'ere's dat?"

"La Salle street."

"I don't b'lieve it," responded the other promptly. "If dey're any place 'bout de city, dey'll be at her friend's out a' Elgin."

"What makes you think so?"

"'Cause dey allus goes dere w'en hard-pressed like dis."

"That is exactly what Docky said with regard to the La Salle street place."

"Oh, dat was 'cause Docky wanted ter t'row yer off de track."

"Do you think so?"

"I'm dead sure."

"Well, Duggan, you have never deceived me thus far, and I will trust you."

"Yer kin, 'cause I wouldn't deceive yer," protested the outlaw.

Having got the directions from Duggan, so that he would know how to find the house, Thad, accompanied by a couple of policemen in plain clothes, took a train that afternoon for the town of Elgin, which is a suburb of Chicago.

In the outskirts of this village stood a neat wooden cottage, two stories high, and surrounded by well-kept grounds full of shrubbery.

A gravel walk led from the gate to the house, bordered on either side by rose-bushes and other flowering shrubs.

As a precautionary measure, the detective left the two policemen at some distance from the house, and went on alone to reconnoiter.

As he approached the little gate leading in-

to the yard, a buggy drove up and a gentleman alighted.

Thad recognized the man at once as a physician, or surgeon, rather, who lived in Chicago.

Guessing that something very serious must be the matter when he was called—he being one of the highest priced, as well as the most skillful surgeons in the city—the detective stepped up to him and asked:

"Somebody sick at the Marvins', doctor?"

"So it seems," replied the man of medicine, good-naturedly.

"Mr. Marvin himself, or some of the family?" pursued Thad.

"Indeed, I could not tell you for the life of me," responded the physician. "All I know about it is this dispatch—Friend of the family?" he suddenly broke off, withholding the telegram which he was about to hand the detective.

"Oh, yes," returned Thad. "Very old friend of the family."

"Well, as I was about to say," pursued the doctor, placing the paper in his pocket instead of giving it to the New Yorker, "I received the dispatch awhile ago, telling me to come out at once, and merely adding the words: 'serious case'; so, until I go in and see, I know as little about the matter as yourself."

With that the surgeon proceeded to the house.

It was impractical for Burr to go to the house at once, as he had in a measure compromised himself in asserting that he was a friend of the family, so he concluded to await the return of the doctor.

He was compelled to wait a long time, two hours, in fact, before the latter reappeared, and when he did come there was an anxious look on his face, indicating that the case was extremely serious.

"Well, doctor," accosted the detective, "is the case serious?"

The doctor glanced at the speaker with a surprised start, and answered abruptly:

"Yes, quite serious."

"One of the family, I suppose?"

"No—that is—yes—one of the family," faltered the surgeon, growing perceptibly confused.

"Not one of the immediate family?" persisted Thad.

"No, not—that is, yes—one of the immediate family."

"Which one, may I ask?"

The doctor climbed into his buggy hastily, and with a nervous movement.

"I—I—am not at liberty to state," he said, as he gave the reins to the horse.

"Pardon me, doctor," interjected Thad, smiling, "but you have forgotten to unhitch your horse. You needn't get down; I'll unhitch him for you. The party who has received the injury—a bullet-wound—is not a member of the family, as you very well know, but a friend, and his name is Francis Percival!"

The doctor grew still more confused.

"I am not at liberty—"

"No, I understand," interrupted Thad, "you have been enjoined to silence; but we understand each other. It shall go no further. Is his wife with him?"

The doctor looked at him, scowled and muttered something that sounded like "impertinent fellow," but made no direct reply.

"That is all right, doctor," Thad ran on. "I know by your silence that she is. There you are! You can drive on now. Good-day, doctor."

But the latter only grunted.

The New York Special returned to the policemen, and said:

"It's all right, but we shan't make the arrests just now. I want to get back to the city. I think a rigid cross-examination of yon fellow driving off there will bring certain matters to light."

"Who is the fellow?" questioned one of the officers.

"He is the surgeon who has been called out to operate upon Percival. He won't talk now, but I guess he will later."

And they took the first train for the city.

CHAPTER XXVII.

A NEW TURN.

It was about seven o'clock in the evening when Thad reached Police Headquarters,

whither he had gone as soon as he arrived in the city.

The chief of police was still there, awaiting him.

"You've been out to Elgin?" he said, as soon as the detective entered the office.

"Yes," was Thad's answer.

"What did you do?"

"Nothing."

"Learn anything?"

"Yes, I learned that Percival and his wife are there, and that he is in a dangerous condition."

"You did not deem it wise, under the circumstances, to make any arrests?"

"No, I did not think it necessary."

"You did just right. It was not necessary," interposed the chief. "We have just received intelligence that the fellow is dead, and the woman promises that if she is allowed her liberty until she buries her husband, she will give herself up."

"Do you think she can be trusted?"

"Oh, as to that, if she wishes to try to break away after we have trusted her thus far, we can afford to let her go. We have got all the 'swag,' as they call it."

"Still, I should dislike to let her go," objected Thad. "She is a desperate character, and should be caged by all means."

"Well, I shall be responsible for her actions," retorted Granger bluntly.

When Thad left the station his mind was full of this last remark, and he could not help comparing it with the woman's boast that they would not dare to hold her.

And again he asked himself, "Is there anything in it?" and he could not but answer that he believed there was.

And continuing to reflect upon the matter, he wondered if the man was really dead, or was this a new phase of the subtle woman's cunning.

In order to satisfy himself upon this point, he learned the address of the surgeon who had attended Percival and called upon him.

"You were a little averse to answering questions touching your Elgin patient this afternoon, doctor," began the detective, "and I do not blame you."

"Oh, you're the fellow who was so inquisitive, are you?" sputtered the doctor, testily.

"Yes, sir, I am the man," smiled Thad, "and, although I did not so inform you then, you see I was authorized to do so."

And Thad exhibited his badge.

"Oh, you're a detective, are you?" growled the surgeon. "Well, what do you want?"

"Very little. I hear that the man upon whom you operated, is dead. You should know whether this true or not. Is it?"

"Is that all you want to know?" growled the other, again.

"Well, that is a part of what I want to know. Is it true?"

The doctor reflected for some moments, modified his tone a good deal, and at length answered:

"I have just received word that it is."

"There can be no mistake about this, I suppose?"

"I do not see how there can. The dispatch is signed by George Marvin himself, and I cannot see what motive he could have in telegraphing an untruth to me."

"Certainly, he could have none, doctor. The only question with me is, whether he sent the dispatch."

"Oh, there can be no doubt about that. Who else could send it?"

"Before I answer that, let me ask you if you are acquainted with the character of the man upon whom you operated, and that of his wife?"

"No, I have no acquaintance with either of them, but being introduced by the Marvins as their friends, I naturally assumed that they were all right."

"That is where decent people often make great blunders in making acquaintances. This man is a murderer, and his wife is a diamond-thief."

The doctor started almost out of his chair.

"You astound me, sir!" he exclaimed.

"Well, I may, but it is the truth, nevertheless."

"Explain, please."

"You remember reading in the papers,

some two weeks and a half ago, about the body of a man being found in a trunk, in a cheap West side hotel, don't you?"

"Yes."

"Well, this man whom you operated on this afternoon was the perpetrator of that crime."

"How do you know this?"

"I have just traced it to him."

"This is awful!" ejaculated the doctor, horrified.

"So it is. And now perhaps you would like to know where he got the wound which made it necessary to call you in?"

"I should like to know—yes."

"It was I who gave it to him."

"Indeed? In attempting to take him?"

"Yes."

"And the woman? You say she is a diamond-thief?"

"Yes. Do you remember of reading, about the same time of the finding of the body in the trunk, of a woman going to a diamond merchant in State street, representing herself as the wife of the keeper of an insane asylum, and having the merchant send two sets of diamonds to the house?"

"Yes, yes. I remember the circumstances," cried the doctor. "I believe she passed the jeweler's son off for her brother, didn't she, and had him detained in the institution as a lunatic?"

"Yes. Well, this is the woman."

"You don't tell me?" cried the doctor. "And yet she appears to be very much of a lady."

"That is the worst part of it. It enables her to deceive unsuspecting people. By the way, you didn't tell me whether she was there with her husband or not."

"She was."

"Now, let us come back to where we started," interjected the detective. "Of course, you have no reason to doubt the genuineness or truthfulness of the dispatch, and the only question with me was, had Mr. Marvin or somebody else sent it."

"I see," put in the doctor.

"If he sent it, it is all right. But I did not know but that this woman might have had a finger in it. It would be in keeping with her cunning. But there is one way of proving it—I mean logically."

"Yes?" interjected the doctor.

"Was the character of his wound such as to lead you to fear that death might result from it?"

The doctor knit his brows and reflected for some little time.

"To speak candidly," he said at last, "I did not so consider it. The wound was severe, and, under certain circumstances, might prove fatal. But, when I left the patient, I did not consider that he was in any immediate danger."

"Still, under certain contingencies he might have died from the wound?"

"Yes, under extreme contingencies."

"Well, I am as much at sea as ever," said Thad, rising to take his departure. "If you had told me that the wound could, under no circumstances, prove fatal, I should have said at once that the dispatch was sent by the woman as a blind; but as you put it, there may be truth in the statement that the man is dead. My only resource now is to pay another visit to Elgin."

Late in the evening the detective made another trip to Elgin, and found that the report was true. Percival was actually dead.

Thad considered that his work was about at an end, but the events of the next few days showed that it was not.

Two days from the time just recorded Mrs. Percival, or Winnifred Rayburn, buried her husband, when relying upon her honor, the chief of police expected, or pretended to expect, her to return to the city and surrender herself to justice according to her promise.

But Thad never believed she would do anything of the kind, and accordingly kept his eye upon her.

He congratulated himself upon one piece of information, which was not in possession of any of the authorities.

He knew, or had good reason to suspect, that the woman had very little money, and for that reason it was more than likely that she wouldn't try to dispose of her furniture and bric-a-brac before her final flight.

Having this in mind, Thad kept a close watch of the apartments in Forest avenue long after the police had been withdrawn from the house.

Three days after the death of Percival, and one day after the funeral, Thad called upon the chief at his request, and the chief informed him, with crestfallen countenance:

"Burr, your prediction was right with regard to that woman."

"How was that?" interrogated the detective.

"She has given us the slip," replied the chief, dolefully.

"You don't tell me?" exclaimed Thad.

"Look at that," said the chief, handing him a letter.

The letter was dated at Montreal, Canada, and was unquestionably in Winnifred's handwriting, which Thad was well acquainted with by this time.

It was addressed to the chief of police of Chicago, and ran thus:

"DEAR CHIEF—

"When I promised to come back and give myself up after the funeral of my husband, I made a promise which no woman in her right mind could possibly fulfill. If the charges against me were nothing more than the diamond job, it would not be so difficult; but your detective had the goodness to inform me that there was sufficient evidence to warrant an indictment against me for complicity in the murder of Langford.

"Now, I am still a young woman, and life is as sweet to me as to you, your wife, sister or daughter, and you cannot blame me for trying to cling to it as long as possible, even though it has had its dark and its bitter spots.

"As the date of this letter shows, I am now in Canada; but do not be foolish enough to think of extraditing me from here, for by the time you get this I shall be on my way to the Old World—what part, you may never know, and it will do you no good to try to find out, for I shall go in disguise and under a false name.

"Wishing you better success in the case of other wrong-doers, I remain,

"Yours very truly,

"WINNIFRED RAYBURN."

"What do you think of that?" asked the chief when Thad looked up after perusing the letter.

Thad shook his head and smiled significantly.

"Hoax!" was the simple reply.

"What do you mean?"

"That she is no more in Canada on her way to the Old World than you or I."

"What makes you think that?" demanded the chief, half indignantly.

"Well, for one thing," answered Burr, "she has not had time to reach Montreal and write back; in the second place, if you will notice, the stamp on the envelope is an American, and not a Canadian one; in the next place, while it bears the Montreal office stamp, which any person of this woman's resources could easily put on; the time of day is not indicated, showing that the stamp in her possession to be one of the old ones in vogue before the new law went into effect."

"Is that all?" gasped the chief.

"Not quite. All letters crossing the border have a special stamp, which I do not find on this envelope."

"Burr, you are a remarkable man," declared the chief enthusiastically. "I should never have noticed these things. So you think it possible that the woman may still be in the city?"

"I do, and if I am not greatly disappointed, I shall again have her in custody within twenty-four hours."

"Good luck to you, old fellow," cried the chief. "I hope you may."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A WRONG LEAD.

FATIGUED with his hard day's work and the loss of sleep for several nights, Thad, on leaving Police Headquarters started directly for his hotel.

He had to pass along a dark portion of Clark street on his way, which was extremely quiet at this time of night.

As he was about turning into Randolph

he noticed a woman standing at the corner of the building.

She was concealed by the deep shadow at that point, so that it was by the merest accident he noticed her.

At first the detective thought there was some one with her, but upon close scrutiny he saw that what he had taken for a human being was only a shadow.

Thad did not concern himself about the woman, and was about to pass on, when something occurred that attracted his attention.

Chancing to glance back over his shoulder after he had got a little past her, he observed that she was watching him with suspicious intentness.

Even this might not have aroused his suspicions, but the instant she saw that she was caught watching him, she averted her head, at the same time clearing her throat in a suspicious manner.

Thad's suspicions were at once aroused, and he determined to see what was in the wind.

Strolling leisurely and carelessly on for a little distance, he crossed the street and glided cautiously back to the corner again.

This corner was in even deeper gloom than the opposite one.

Having grown used to the darkness, he could see that the woman had been joined by a second person, apparently a man.

They were engaged in conversation, and the woman would step to the corner of the building now and then and strain her eyes in the direction the detective had gone.

At length the second person moved away and Thad saw that his surmise had been correct, it was a man.

As soon as he was gone, the woman peered round the corner again and, apparently satisfied that he (Thad) was gone, stole away from the corner and started along Clark street toward the south.

Being satisfied that something crooked was going on, and that it bore some relation to the case he was working on, the detective followed at a safe distance.

Going as far as Madison street, the woman turned into that and went toward the west.

At La Salle street she turned again, and going a short distance turned into a doorway.

It was the very house in front of which Thad had seen the buggy standing a few nights previously.

By the time she had reached the doorway he was but a few steps behind her.

Pretending that he was about to walk by, he cast his eye carelessly into the doorway, and was surprised to see that the door was closed, and she was merely screening herself in the recess.

She was on the look-out for him, however, and the moment he came in sight she cringed more closely into the corner of the jamb in the evident hope of escaping observation.

It was impossible to discern what she looked like, as, besides being in the shadow, she wore a heavy veil.

Thad walked on for a little distance revolving the matter in his mind, and considering whether he should turn back and ascertain something about the woman, or to go on about his business.

At length he chose the former.

Strolling leisurely back, he found the woman still standing in the doorway.

Thad turned abruptly on coming opposite her, and strode up to her.

"Rather late and rather cool to be out, isn't it, madam?" he asked.

The woman started, and Thad imagined he could see her trembling.

"Better go on about your business," she apped.

"Perhaps this is my business," he said, coolly. "Why were you watching me so closely awhile ago?"

"I tell you to go along. If you don't I'll call a policeman."

"Policemen have no terrors for me, especially as I happen to be in the same line. Come, answer my question."

"I wasn't watching for you," she snarled, not quite so independently this time. "I never saw you before."

"That will do for you," laughed Thad.

"You stared right at me as I turned the corner of Randolph and Clark street."

"I didn't know it was you," she muttered.

"No?"

"No, I didn't."

"Who did you think it was?"

"I thought it was Francis—that is—I didn't know who it was," she faltered.

"What did you stare at me so for?"

"Because—because—you looked at me."

"You are quite sure you did not mistake me for some one else?"

"Well, I didn't know but it might be—er—"

"Francis, eh?" interposed Thad.

"No, I didn't."

"By the way, what is this Francis's other name?"

"I don't know."

"You don't know Francis, then?"

"No."

"Why did you mention the name awhile ago, then?"

"I made a mistake."

"I guess not."

"Sure I did."

"Do you want me to tell you his other name?"

"No."

"Well, then, I will tell you anyway."

The woman seemed to shudder.

"His other name," pursued Thad, "is Percival—Francis Percival."

The woman started, but made no reply.

"Do you know him?" persisted the detective.

"No."

"You are sure?"

"I am sure."

"Still I believe you do."

"I do not."

"What made you start so when I uttered his name?"

"I only shivered with the cold," she whimpered. "It's getting awfully chilly. Why don't you go away and let me go home?"

"I am not hindering you from going home. However, you appeared in no hurry to go home awhile ago."

She made no reply.

"Thinking you might have known Francis Percival," pursued Thad, "I didn't know but it might interest you to know that he is dead."

"Dead!"

The exclamation was plainly involuntary and there could be no doubts as to its genuineness.

She saw that she had made a mistake and strove to rectify it.

"It is nothing to me if he is dead, as I do not know him," she said in a tone of affected indifference. "Why do you speak to me about it?"

"Because I am convinced now more than ever that you do know him. Now tell me, if you do not wish to have me take you to the police station and lock you up, where is his wife, Winnifred Rayburn?"

"I tell you I don't know anything about any of them," she protested.

"I see how it is," said Thad coolly, taking a step toward her, "I've got to lock you up. Possibly a night in a cell will bring you to your senses."

The woman cringed and shrunk still more closely into the corner of the jamb, but offered no resistance, nor did she yield her point that she knew nothing about the people in question.

Thad took her by the arm and drew her gently out of the doorway.

The arm he grasped was slender and delicate and he noticed for the first time that the woman was tall and slender.

This set him to thinking.

Was it possible that she could be Winnifred Rayburn?

He soon disabused his mind of this, however, for if it had been she, she would already have known that Percival was dead.

The woman walked quietly along at his side for about a block and no conversation passed between them. Then suddenly she halted and asked:

"Where are you going to take me?"

"To the police station," replied Thad.

"What for?"

"Because you refuse to tell what you know about Winnifred Rayburn."

"But I tell you that I do not know."

"And I tell you that you do—at least I believe you do, and the easiest way of ascertaining is by locking you up over night. There is nothing that loosens a witness's tongue equal to that."

"And when you have locked me up over night and then discovered that I am innocent—at least ignorant of the facts you speak of, what redress have you to offer me for the outrage?"

Thad's resolution was slightly shaken by this question.

It seemed to be the words of an innocent woman.

Still he did not like to yield the point and release her until he had tested the question a little further.

"Oh, well," he answered, "you have your remedy. Sue the city for false imprisonment."

"That would be a good deal of satisfaction to me. Besides if I should win the suit it would take years to collect the money."

"Yes, it is an up-hill business," said the detective, reflectively.

They walked on in silence for some distance again, and then she suddenly halted again and turning upon him, said:

"I believe you intend to do just what you said you would."

"That is exactly what I intend to do," returned Thad coolly.

"Then, I suppose I might as well give in. Come with me and I will tell you all I know about this case."

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE TRAP.

HOPING that he was about to discover the very clue that he was looking for, Thad accompanied the mysterious woman.

He was surprised to see that she was returning the same way she had come, and still more surprised when she returned to the identical doorway; but instead of pausing there this time, she put a key into the door, opened it and went in.

The hallway was pitch dark, and Thad experienced a slight misgiving on entering.

But as the woman said "Come on," and continued on her course, he decided to hazard any danger there might be in store, and followed her.

She soon began ascending a flight of stairs, simply remarking:

"Pretty dark; you'll have to feel your way up."

And so Thad found. He was compelled to grope, and guide himself by the railing.

Three flights of stairs were thus blindly ascended, and then he heard the woman putting a key into a door.

When the door was open it was as dark as ever, but the woman said:

"Wait a moment and I'll strike a light."

Thad had passed through the door, and she had closed it.

True to her word, she soon had a light, and the detective saw a small but neatly-furnished room, which was evidently one of several.

The woman invited him to be seated, and then sat down herself.

But, to his disappointment, she did not uncover her face.

"Now, what was it you wished to ask me?" she began.

"I want to ask you where Winnifred Rayburn is," responded Thad.

"And if I tell you?"

"Oh, you shall be rewarded."

"To what extent?"

"Oh, say a hundred dollars."

"Not enough."

"Two hundred?"

"Call it five hundred and it is a bargain."

Thad reflected.

Would it be worth this amount of money to know where the wily woman was?

The reward offered for her was large, and there appeared no immediate prospect of running her down.

If this woman could actually inform him of her whereabouts, it would be a great saving of time and trouble.

"It is a bargain," he at length said.

"Tell me where Winnifred Rayburn is, and if I find that you have told me the truth, you shall have the five hundred dollars."

"But how will I know where to find you?"

"There is no difficulty about that."

And he handed her his card with the name of the hotel where he was stopping written on it.

"Even then, I cannot tell whether you will be there or not."

"If I am not you can easily find out where I am by inquiring at Police Headquarters."

She shook her head dubiously.

"I'm afraid to trust you," she said.

"What do you want?"

"The money in advance."

"That is impossible."

"Why impossible?"

"Because I haven't the money with me."

She reflected a moment and then said:

"You can give me a check."

Thad jumped at the proposition.

This would give him a chance to catch her in case her information should not be correct.

"Very well," he said, "give me the information I desire and you shall have a check for five hundred dollars."

"No, I must have it before I say a word on the subject."

Thad thought a moment, and then drawing his check-book from his pocket, asked:

"What name shall I make it out to?"

"Make it 'to bearer,'" she replied, promptly.

The detective saw the trick at once.

"No, I never make out checks in that way," he said, "it isn't business."

"I won't have it any other way," she said, flatly.

"And you won't give the information I desire?"

"I will not."

"Then my only recourse is to do what I started to do in the first place."

"Take me to prison?"

"That's it."

She dropped her eyes and appeared to be in deep study.

At length she raised her head and there was a strange twinkle in her eye as she said:

"You have the best of me there. Well, make the check to Francis Burton."

Thad hesitated, meanwhile wondering what her game was. And finally filled out the check, signed it and handed it to her.

She took the slip of paper and gazed at it a few moments, and then said:

"And now you want me to tell you where Winnifred Rayburn is, do you?"

"Yes."

"Have you ever been at Elgin?"

"Yes."

He was about to tell her that he had been there very recently, but checked himself in time.

"In the suburbs of the town there lives a family who are the friends of the Percivals."

"You don't mean the Marvins?"

"Yes I do."

"You don't mean to tell me that she is there?"

"I do."

"Are you aware that Francis Percival died at that house this very evening?"

"No," she replied with great coolness.

"Well, he did."

"How do you know this?"

"I have it on good authority."

"Nevertheless, I tell you that it is not true."

"How do you know?"

"I left there not two hours ago."

"And he was still alive?"

"Yes."

"And they were both at the house?"

"They were."

Thad was puzzled.

He did not know whether to take her word for it or not.

In the face of the report sent to Police Headquarters that the man was dead, he did not know what to think.

And then he recalled what the chief of police had said about the woman promising to give herself up, and he thought that if there was any truth in what this woman had told him, it might be that the message received by the chief was a hoax cooked up between the pair, and that the statement that Percival was dead was made for the purpose of throwing the police off the track and gaining time.

Her letter purporting to come from Canada, which the detective was satisfied was

bogus, was sufficient to prove that she was capable of anything.

Another thing: it did not seem reasonable that she would leave her dead husband before he was buried, after receiving the assurance of the police that she would not be arrested until the ceremony was over.

Upon the whole, he began to think there might be some truth in what this woman had told him.

"At any rate," he at length resumed, "the fellow is pretty low?"

"Yes, he is a pretty sick man," she admitted.

"Too sick to travel, is he not?"

"I don't know about that. He is pretty sick, but a man will undertake a good deal when his liberty is at stake."

"How long do you think they intend remaining at Marvin's?"

"No longer than is absolutely necessary. It would not surprise me if they left to-night. They certainly will not remain longer than to-morrow, unless he has a relapse."

"You think it would be wise to get out there at once, then?"

"I should."

"Now, look here, what is your motive for giving this information?"

The woman laughed.

"Five hundred dollars," she answered.

"Was this woman a friend of yours?"

"Oh, so-so."

"And don't you consider it a trifle mean to betray a friend?"

She laughed again.

"Friends don't count for much in this world," she said, "unless there is something to be made out of them. Winnifred Percival, or Rayburn as she calls herself, wouldn't hesitate to call me down if there was anything in it."

"Possibly not. But I must go," he said, rising. "Now, see here, if what you have told me turns out to be false, it will go hard with you. On the other hand, if it proves to be true and I succeed in securing this woman, you may call upon me for an additional five hundred dollars."

"Thanks."

Thad started for the door, and she examined the check again.

"One moment," she called after him.

"Well?"

"How am I to get this cashed?"

"Any bank will cash it for you. You see it is made on the Exchange National Bank of New York, and they have a branch in Chicago. Take it there."

"But I will have to be identified."

"Certainly."

"I don't know a soul in the city who could introduce me to a bank."

A happy thought occurred to Thad.

"Call at my address at two to-morrow afternoon and I will get it cashed for you."

"No, that won't do me," she retorted sulkily. "You must know somebody that will cash it to-night."

"No, I don't know a soul who would be up at this time of night."

"Well, then, ye'd better wake somebody up," interposed a gruff voice, and looking in the direction, Thad beheld a burly ruffian who had come in from some mysterious place.

The fellow held a revolver in each hand, and from the scowl he had on his ugly face it was evident that he wouldn't hesitate an instant to use them.

There was but one chance for Thad, and that was to reach the door.

He was but a few steps from it, and he was not long in taking them.

Another instant his hand was upon the knob.

He gave it a vigorous turn—and found that it was locked.

The ruffian and the woman laughed.

CHAPTER XXX.

A NEAT TURN.

THAD saw that he was in a trap.

A trap that had been neatly set for him by the woman.

There were two alternatives only.

One was to fight, and the other was to resort to stratagem.

He thought rapidly.

He was never long at a loss for a resource, and one came to him now.

He forced a laugh, and said:

"You've got me. I give in! Come along, and we'll see if we can't find some one who will cash the check."

This was an unexpected turn and took the ruffian by surprise.

He looked puzzled, and finally grunted out:

"W'ere d'yer purpose ter go fer this 'ere cash?"

"Oh, Lord, I don't know. Possibly the night clerk of the hotel where I am stopping will cash it."

"W'ot hotel's dat?"

"The Auditorium."

"Dat's a good jag frum hiar."

"Not so very far; at all events, that is the nearest point I know of where I can get it cashed at this hour of the night."

The fellow grunted and scratched his head.

"Yer don't know of no place nearder, don't yer?"

"I do not."

The ruffian cudgled his stupid brain, and finally asked:

"Ain't dey no way dat yer kin fix dat dockyment so's I kin git it cashed widout youse?"

"No way that I know of except as I told the lady, to take it to the bank to-morrow and be identified."

"Dat don't suit, see," growled the ruffian.

"Well, then, the only other way is for you to come with me to the hotel."

The fellow beckoned the woman to him, and they held a confidential conversation of some length.

At length the man spoke:

"I reckon I'll let the woman go wid yer, but mind, if dere's any crooked work dere'll be music in de air fer youse!"

"All right" laughed the detective, glad of any solution to the problem, although he would rather have had the man accompany him.

The woman signified her readiness to go at once, as she had not removed her street apparel since coming in.

She took a key from her pocket and unlocked the door, and left the apartment, followed by Thad.

He had failed to notice that she had locked the door before striking a light on coming in.

They were soon in the street, and the detective said:

"As the distance is considerable, I guess I had better call a cab."

"No, no," responded the woman, apprehensively. "I would prefer to walk."

"There is just where you and I differ," he laughed. "I prefer to ride, and if you go with me, you will also ride."

At that moment an empty vehicle was passing and Thad hailed it.

The woman still hesitated, but at length allowed herself to be assisted into the cab.

Thad then whispered his directions to the driver, and climbed in.

The woman was silent, and Thad could feel her trembling.

When they had gone some distance, she said in a tremulous voice:

"You aren't going to betray me, are you?"

"What do you mean?"

"What were your directions to the driver before we started?"

"To the Auditorium, of course."

"Was it necessary to be so confidential about that?" she asked, sarcastically.

"Oh, one don't care to let everybody know his business," laughed Thad, amused at her keenness.

"You did not tell him to drive to the hotel, at all," she snapped.

"No?"

"No."

"Where, then?"

"The police station."

"Why do you think so?"

"I know from your actions."

"Perhaps you had better not go along, then?"

"I sha'n't. Stop the cab," she cried.

"How do you expect to get the check cashed, in that case?"

"Never mind the check. Let me out."

"Since you put it in that way, I shall do

nothing of the kind, and instead of driving to the hotel, as I had intended, I shall act upon your hint, and go to the police station."

"Let me out!" she screeched.

"Not for the world," answered Thad.

"You are my prisoner."

"I'll call for help," she threatened.

"Do, by all means, and see what you will gain by it. You will probably attract a policeman, to whom I will simply show my detective's badge, and you will be laughed at for your pains."

"But you had no warrant for me."

"I required none. I arrest you upon suspicion of having a guilty knowledge of Winnifred Rayburn's crime, and of conspiracy with your man back there in attempting to extort money."

This had a calming effect upon her and for some moments she was silent.

At length she resumed:

"Say, you saw that it was he that insisted upon the check being cashed to-night. Why should you arrest me?"

"You were in collusion. It was you who first demanded it."

"Because I knew he would beat me if I didn't," she whimpered.

Thad did not doubt the truth of this, and it touched him more sensibly than he would have cared to have admitted.

"The last thing he said to me," she pursued, "was, if you don't fetch the money back with you, I'll kill you!"

"Why, then, do you go back to him?"

"Where else can I go?"

"Go to the hotel. I will see that you are provided with lodging, and if I find that you have told me the truth about Winnifred Rayburn I will give you the five hundred dollars to-morrow, and then you will be independent of him, at least for awhile, and before the money is exhausted you may find some honest employment by which you can earn a living."

"I cannot do it," she replied in a feeble voice, by which he ascertained that she was weeping.

"Why not?"

"He is my husband, for one thing, and bad as he is, I love him. Besides, there is no place I could go that he would not follow, and if I should desert him like this he would kill me."

"In that case, the best place for you is the prison. He can't get at you there. And if necessary I'll have him locked up, and then I am very certain he won't molest you again."

"Yes, he would. You couldn't lock him up for long, unless you had some charge against him, and as soon as he got out he would hunt me up and murder me."

Thad was in a quandary, and at length asked:

"What is to be done, then?"

"Nothing, except to give me the money and let me return to him."

"That I cannot do."

"Why not?"

"Because I do not know whether you have told me the truth or not."

"But you have already given me the check," she persisted.

"Certainly, but I did not intend that you should get the money on it until I had ascertained whether everything was right or not."

"Then you did not intend to get the check cashed at the hotel?"

"Certainly not."

She made no reply, and he went on.

"What shall I do?"

At that moment the cab stopped in front of the police station.

The woman put her head out and, seeing where she was, asked:

"You will not give the money?"

"Not until I find out whether everything is as you say. If it is, you will get the money to-morrow."

"Then lock me up," she answered.

They alighted and entered the station.

"What is the prisoner charged with?" inquired the sergeant, when Thad stood in front of the bar with the woman.

"I do not wish to prefer any charge to-night, sergeant," replied Thad. "I only wish to have her detained pending some investigations I am going to make to-night."

Thad then explained the case upon which

he was engaged, and his reasons for suspecting that the woman was implicated with the notorious diamond thief.

"Very well, Mr. Burr," returned the sergeant. "I will hold her pending your investigations. Remove your veil, madam, till I see what you look like," he pursued, addressing the woman.

"Is it necessary?" she hesitated.

"It is," gruffly returned the officer.

"I'd rather not, sir."

"And I demand that you do."

Still she hesitated.

"Remove it!" commanded the sergeant, "or else I shall have to remove it for you."

She still refused to comply, and the sergeant beckoned to a patrolman near by, and the latter stepped up and snatched away the veil before she had time to think what had happened.

"Jerusalem!" exclaimed the sergeant, as soon as he saw her face. "Meg Potts, or I'll eat my hat! Why, Meg, I haven't seen you in these parts for a month of Sundays. Where have you been keeping yourself? Haven't been doing time, I reckon?"

"No, been abroad," murmured the woman, scarcely above a whisper.

"Abroad, eh? Doing the grand among the crown-heads, I reckon? Well, old girl, you never need to stay out in the rain as long as we've got a three-by-six vacant. Mulligan, give our old friend in charge of the matron."

Thad was surprised to see what had once been a very beautiful woman, but somewhat faded by dissipation.

"You caught a Tartar that time, detective," resumed the sergeant when the woman had been removed.

"Bad one, eh?"

"Bad is no name for it. She used to be considered the slickest all-around crook in Chicago."

Half an hour later Thad boarded a train for Elgin.

CHAPTER XXXI.

A WILD-GOOSE CHASE.

It was not far from morning when Thad arrived in Elgin, and by the time he had walked out to the suburban residence of the Marvins the sun was up.

Nevertheless, being country people, they were already astir.

Thad was met at the door by a servant, to whom he communicated his wish to see Mr. Marvin.

That gentleman appeared promptly, and the detective stated the object of his visit at once.

"I may as well be frank with you, Mr. Marvin," he said, "and tell you that I am a detective."

"Ah! Then, in that case I guess I can guess the nature of your business with me," rejoined Marvin, who was a cordial, frank man. "You have come to see if the Percivals are still stopping with me."

"The Percivals?" interposed Thad.

"Well, rather the woman," corrected the other. "I suppose you know that he is dead?"

"That is what we have been led to believe, but from information received last night, I had cause almost to doubt it."

"I do not see why you should doubt it, as I and the doctor have kept Chief of Police Granger posted right along."

"So he informed me, but I ran upon a witness last night, or this morning, rather, who gave me her word that Percival was still alive, was convalescing, and the chances were favorable for the pair leaving your house to-day."

Marvin, who Thad could not fail to see was an honest man, was visibly hurt at this information, and the detective, being quick to see the effect of his words, hastened to amend them with:

"I am convinced now, however, that I have been deceived by a wily woman, and that my trip out here has been a wild-goose chase."

The gentleman's brow cleared.

"Oh, I can understand how necessary it is for you people to be cautious, and even suspicious of every one. And now to convince you beyond a possibility of a doubt, if you will be good enough to step into the sitting-room, I will furnish you a few proofs."

The conversation thus far had been held

standing in the hall. Thad followed his host into a neat little sitting-room, where he remained while Marvin went to fetch the proofs.

He had not long to wait before the latter returned and handed him a paper.

It was a physician's certificate of death, and when Thad had examined it and found it regular, Marvin handed him another paper, which proved to be a burial permit.

"This is all regular, Mr. Marvin," said Thad, returning the documents. "And I hope you will pardon me for putting you to all this trouble."

"Don't mention it, my dear sir," replied the other heartily.

"But the fact is," pursued the detective, "that that woman is such a wily creature that I was ready to believe in any trick of which she might be the author."

"I can understand that, sir," said the other affably. "I am now convinced that she is a very bad woman, although I never suspected it until lately."

"By the way, you do not happen to know where she is now, do you?"

"I have not the remotest idea. She left here immediately after the funeral, and I haven't seen her since."

"Have you any reason to believe that she has gone to Canada?"

"I have not; and indeed, I do not believe she has. I do not believe she had money enough. Why, did you hear that she had gone to Canada?"

"Yes, although I put no faith in the report, and this was one reason for my suspecting the report of her husband's death to be a hoax, got up by herself. You see, the chief of police received a letter from her yesterday afternoon dated at Montreal. I was almost sure it was a ruse the moment I examined it, and when last night a woman who appears to know all about her and her affairs, told me that Percival was still alive and they were both still here, I could not be blamed for giving the statement some credence."

"Assuredly not. By the way, who is this woman that gave you the information?"

"She is known to the police as Meg Potts. She is a woman, I should say, about thirty or so, and has been pretty good-looking."

"I know her, I guess. She was with the Percivals when I first met them in Europe, acting in the capacity of maid to Mrs. Percival. She was out here once while they were here."

"Was she here yesterday?"

"No, not since Winnifred left."

"She informed me that she had just come from here. It seems you have known the Percivals some time?"

"Well, yes, I have, and I haven't," said Marvin reflectively. "We met them at Baden Baden five years ago. It was late in the season and there were very few people at the watering place, and it was natural that we should get acquainted. They being Americans the same as ourselves and apparently well-to-do and evidently respectable, we became somewhat intimate. Two years ago we met them again in Switzerland and renewed the acquaintance. From that day, however, I had seen or heard nothing of them until they dropped in upon us last week, he in a dying condition."

"What explanation did they offer for his being shot?"

"They represented that he had encountered an old enemy who had followed him from Europe, and this enemy had opened fire at sight."

"Pardon the question," interjected Thad, after a pause. "I do not imagine that you could have been aware of their true character, but had you ever any reason to suspect they were the sort of people they actually were?"

"Never had the slightest conception of it until I was informed by the Chicago police. She always conducted herself like a lady, and he like a gentleman. She is unquestionable a woman of more than ordinary accomplishments, and it has been hinted more than once that she is a scion of the nobility."

"Did you know that she had given her promise to the police that if she were allowed to bury her husband she would return to the city and give herself up?"

"Yes, Chief Granger so informed me, and she signified her intention of fulfilling her promise."

"She knew, then, that you had discovered the nature of her character?"

"She confessed to a portion of it, upon being accosted by me, but only a portion, and not the worst by any means. And she justified herself to some extent by telling me that she had been forced into it by her husband and brother-in-law, a man named Jules Revere, and I believe her."

"On the contrary, in my opinion, she is responsible largely for the ruin of both of them. I suppose you do not know whether this other woman is implicated in any of her crimes or not?"

"I do not."

"You never heard Winnifred speak of her?"

"Only casually, after the woman's visit here. Mrs. Percival spoke of her as a good, patient, trustworthy soul."

"This was before you discovered the kind of woman Mrs. Percival was, I presume?"

"Yes. It was the first day they were out here."

"Well," said Thad, rising, "I won't trouble you any longer. I am under a thousand obligations to you for the information you have given, and I want to apologize once more for putting you to so much trouble."

"I beg that you won't mention it, sir, and I hope you are not going to run away without breakfast. Breakfast is just ready now."

"Thanks, I won't trouble you, sir," protested Thad.

"But I insist," persisted Marvin, "I allow no gentleman to leave my house at meal-time without eating."

And so Thad was compelled to yield.

As soon as breakfast was over he took leave of his new friends, and taking the first train, was soon back in Chicago.

His first move on arriving in the city was to call at the police-station where Meg Potts was locked up and, after preferring formal charges against her, secured an interview with the woman in her cell.

She was considerably crestfallen after her night in prison, and met the detective with downcast eyes.

"Well, madam," began Thad, "are you ready to have that check cashed, or did they take it away from you?"

"I threw it away before they got a chance," she replied sullenly. "Catch me having anything like that on my person to invite inquiry. Go out to Elgin?" she asked suddenly.

"Yes."

"And found that all I had told you was a lie?"

"Pretty much all."

"I was a fool for attempting that game," she muttered dolefully. "I might have known you would catch me. But he made me do it."

"If he did, you are to be pitied," said Thad sympathetically. "But that remains to be proved."

"You have preferred charges, of course?"

"Yes."

"Oh, well, when the trial comes on, maybe old Meg won't turn out to be quite as black as she is painted."

"Have you any confession to make?"

"None."

"You were in no wise implicated with Winnifred Rayburn in her crimes, then?"

"As God is my witness, I was not—at least these last ones."

That same day Thad arrested Francis Potts, the woman's husband, on a charge of conspiracy.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE RUN-IN.

THE night following Thad's talk with the chief he went to the Revere house again, and ascended at once to the top floor.

To his surprise Duggan was still there, on guard as usual.

"My dear fellow," cried the detective, "there was no need of your remaining here. Why have you done it?"

"Yer didn't tell me dat de guard was off," explained the outlaw, "and w'en I goes on guard, dere I stays till relieved."

"You're like the boy that stood upon the burning deck," laughed Thad. "But what

have you done for something to eat all this time?"

"Dere's a plenty dere," replied the fellow, "cold ham an' bread an' whisky—w'ot more kin mortal man ax for?"

"Well, you're easily satisfied, old fellow. But has any one been up here since I went away?"

"Nope, not till to-day. She was here to-day."

"Who, Winnifred Rayburn?"

"Yep, de dame."

"Was she alone?"

"Nope, she had a man wid 'er."

"A man? Who was he?"

"Idunno; dough 'spect he was a furnicher dealer."

"Ah, just as I thought," exclaimed the detective. "She wants to sell out and leave the diggings. Did the man agree to take the things from her?"

"I couldn't make out whedder dey struck a bargain or not. Dere was a lot o' dick-erin' on both sides, an' at las' dey went away."

"Did she say anything about coming back?"

"Nope, not dat I heerd."

"Did she ask you what you were doing here?"

"Nope, an' for de very good reason dat she didn't see me."

"Oh, you were hid, then?"

"Yep, as soon as I heerd her comin' I crept into de closet w'ere you was dat night o' de fight."

"Well, this settles one point, anyway," said the detective, musingly.

"W'ot's dat, cap'n?" asked Duggan.

"A letter has been received from her at Police Headquarters, purporting to come from Canada, and claiming that she was up there. I didn't believe it from the first."

"Nope, she ain't a-goin' ter skip till she gits rid o' dis lumber, 'cause I reckon her ladyship's about broke."

"I shouldn't wonder, and I have had the same opinion about her getting rid of her furniture for that reason."

"Wal, w'ot's de lay? Watch here for 'er?"

"Yes, that is all we can do."

"How 'bout His Whiskers?"

"Oh, I forgot that you did not know about it," exclaimed Thad. "He is dead."

"Dead?" cried Duggan.

"Yes."

"Yer bullet fixed 'im?"

"I guess it did, old fellow."

"Den yer can't say dat yer never killed a man no longer, cap'n!" cried the outlaw, exultantly.

"No, I can say it no longer, Duggan," admitted Thad, sorrowfully.

"W'ot, yer ain't sorry fer it, air yer?"

"I would rather that it had not been so, although it was in self-defense."

"Shaw! wait till ye've killed a dozen or more, and den yer can talk. I wisht I had de scalps o' all I've ever cooled, I'd make me a winter overcoat outen 'em."

"You're a bloodthirsty animal, Duggan," uttered the detective turning away in disgust.

Thad remained on guard, and a little before midnight, Duggan, who had been paying periodical visits to the door leading into the secret stairway, came to him and reported that there was somebody coming up the stairs.

"And it sounds like only one," supplemented the lieutenant.

"That is strange," mused Thad. "I wonder if it can be she coming alone? Still, I shouldn't wonder, as she does not expect to find any one here."

At Thad's suggestion, Duggan got into the closet before alluded to, while the detective himself concealed himself behind the hangings of one of the windows.

In a few moments Winnifred came into the very same room where he was concealed, glanced about her, took up one article after another and looked at and laid it down.

Then she lifted a great heavy serpent which lay dormant upon the floor, stroked it affectionately, put it up to her face, and cooed:

"You lazy fellow! How easily you take life! Surely your conscience must be easier than mine, although I have no doubt you have spilt more blood than I have."

Laying it down, she next lifted the lively scorpion which Thad had seen going through the evolutions the night the serpent twined upon his leg, from its perch.

"You little murderer!" she cried, putting the hideous creature's head unpleasantly close to her cheek, supposing it had any inclination to sting: "how many fellow creatures' blood have you spilt?" she went on. "More than I, I'll bet."

Here she restored it to its perch, and looked about her again.

"Ah, me!" she sighed. "I must give you all up, I suppose. It is hard, but that is my last resource. It is either that and flight, or remain here and be hanged like a dog. Ah, me! God! I wish that I had shared his fate! It would be far preferable to such a fate!"

And the realization seemed to come upon her so strong that she instinctively clasped her long slender fingers about her throat.

"It is an awful fate!" she sighed.

"And yet one which you cannot deny that you richly deserve!"

Winnifred turned quickly and grew deathly pale as she saw Thad standing before her.

Neither spoke for a full minute, and Thad was at length the first to break the silence.

"You did not expect to see me here?" he said, smilingly.

But, unlike her usual habit, there was no smiles for her.

She was terribly melancholy in appearance.

"No," she finally answered. "I did not exactly expect to see you here; and yet I have no reason to be surprised at meeting you, or some of your kind, anywhere. I don't suppose there is a haven anywhere upon the green earth to which some of you would not follow me."

"And yet you contemplated seeking that haven, I take it," interjected Thad, still smiling. "Only you would have had us believe that you had already gone."

She smiled bitterly.

"Come, you are here to arrest me, are you?"

"That is about the size of it. Although, to tell you the truth, it goes against the grain."

"How so?"

"I would rather there had been some resistance."

"Oh, haven't you had enough of that in the past?"

Well, I don't know but I have. But, I say, do you not want to make a confession to me? I should very much like to hear your story before I take you to prison."

"You will never take me to prison!" she retorted stoutly, "and I have no desire to make any confession."

Thad interpreted the first part of the speech as a threat of defiance, but affected not to notice it, and continued:

"You will, at least, tell me your story, won't you?"

"No, I won't!" she snapped spitefully.

"I should very much like to hear it. I am sure it would be interesting."

She held out for a long time, but at length, after a good deal of coaxing, she consented, and told the following story:

"I am going to make it very brief," she began. "I was born in Oakland, California. My parents were poor, but I was ambitious, and had a good deal of natural cunning, which coupled with my good looks, carried me through the world."

"I chanced to meet Percival in Paris. I fell in love at once, and, without knowing anything about his character, married him."

"I soon discovered that he was at that time wanted by the police for the crimes of murder and robbery. But I loved him sincerely, and spent all the money I had to save him, but it was of no avail. He was convicted and sent to the galleys for life."

"But he soon escaped from there and joined me in Paris."

"We were once more in each other's arms, but had no money. We must have money, and so he changed his name, assumed the disguise you have always seen him in, and from that time we have lived lives of crime. And so successful have we been,

that he has never since been arrested, and I never was until you arrested me two weeks ago.

"It would be tedious for me to go over in detail my various exploits, so I will come to the one for which I am now wanted—I refer to the murder and robbery of Stephen B. Langford.

"That affair was all concocted by myself. I had known Mr. Langford when I was a child. I paid a visit to my old home in Oakland about six months ago, and while there met my old friend Langford, who lived at Los Angeles, and was at Oakland on a visit.

"I had discovered that he had become very rich, and I persuaded him to take a box of gold bars to New York, telling him that he could sell them at enormous profits by having them there on the market at such times as gold was scarce.

"Well, he easily fell into the trap, and when I had seen him well on his way East with his gold bars, I telegraphed to my husband to meet him at Kansas City, persuade him to stop off at St. Louis, and—well, you know the rest."

"And then you came on immediately yourself?" interposed Thad.

"Yes, I came on the next train, so that I was in Chicago nearly as soon as Langford was in St. Louis."

"But you have said nothing about Revere," put in the detective. "Where does he come in?"

"Poor Revere," she sighed. "He has been a victim and a cat's-paw all his life. He married my sister while I was living a fast life in Paris, and he was an honest man then.

"At length he came to America, and was leading an honest life until we came on and led him astray again."

"Was his lunatic asylum a genuine institution?"

"Yes. He had learned something about the treatment of lunatics in France, and proposed to establish an institution here, but I do not believe he succeeded very well."

"He was in no way implicated in either of the crimes with which you are charged, was he?"

"No, sir. His only crime was that of attempting to shield me when he saw me in trouble."

"According to your letter to your husband while he was in St. Louis, he was not aware that Revere was here until you apprised him of the fact."

"No, not definitely. He knew that he was somewhere in this country, but neither of us knew where he was located until I accidentally ran in upon him in connection with the diamond job. I wanted a lunatic asylum for the job, and I happened to be passing here one day and saw the sign, so I fixed upon this place."

"You did not recognize the name, then?"

"No. Revere is his right name, but he hadn't used it for a good many years, and he had changed so, in appearance that I did not recognize him."

"There is but one more question. How came you to collect all these reptiles, Mrs. Percival?"

"Lord bless you!" she cried, bursting out laughing, "I did not collect them. They were collected by a crank from whom I bought the furniture, and I rather thought I should like them, and bought them with the rest of the things."

"You are satisfied to go to prison now, are you?" asked the detective in conclusion.

"Yes, I do not care what becomes of me, now that he is dead," she said. "My spirit is completely broken, and I may as well die now as later. But I had forgotten," she said, suddenly jumping up; "I told you that you should never take me to prison, and I shall keep my word."

And before the New York Special could intercept her, the desperate and reckless woman, snatched a small vial from her pocket and swallowed the contents.

"Now you are foiled, Thad Burr, for once in your life!" she said with fierce and almost venomous vehemence, but almost immediately sunk down upon the divan from which she had risen, and in five minutes she was no more!

THE END.

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